THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

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Iraq Trip Report Back: Humbling

Aaron Hughes

Thank you VVAW and US Labor Against the War for your generous contribution to help make IVAW's presence at the first International Labor Conference in Erbil, Iraq a reality.

Humbling is the most important word that I can use to describe my recent travels back to Iraq. As I think of how to share this experience with my fellow veterans this word comes to the front of my mind and silences my thoughts.

Humbling.

I start writing this report with caution and awareness that I can never fully understand or express the complexities, pains and hopes of the Iraqi people, but with confidence that I can share the compassion and love that was expressed by the Iraqis despite our contribution to their oppression. It had been well over four years since I last set foot in Iraq, a country that changed my life by awakening me to my own hypocrisies and ability to dehumanize "others." As the plane flew east into the night sky I wrote:

On my way back to Iraq
Anxious
Anxiety sits in my throat and in my heart
Such a beautiful opportunity
Such a beautiful dream
To sit and have tea with the Iraqis
I am so honored to be here
On this trip
Flying into the night
Into the darkness of the unknown
Where one spark of light will light up the whole...

There was tightness in my shoulders when we landed. It was something in the familiarity of the landscape. The dust was the same gray white that I remembered. It washed away the bright colors. The cabs were the same, white with faded orange side panels, and they crowded the roads making the streets hum. The roadside stands were the same as the ones I had seen years earlier, but this time they lined the roads of the northern Iraq.

In 2003 and 2004 I traveled throughout much of Iraq as an 88M truck driver, but never north of Kirkuk. Now, I was an hour north of Kirkuk in Erbil and despite its similar landscape to other parts of Iraq, it clearly felt different. It had a calm that did not carry the same uneasiness I had remembered. According to Samir Adil from the Iraq Freedom Congress and organizing committee of the First International Labor Conference this is why Erbil was chosen to host the conference. He said it was extremely important to have the conference in Erbil so workers from more volatile areas of Iraq could have a space to let down their guard and feel a sense of security. He continued the thought noting, there is so much fear and anxiety

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TJ Buonomo and Aaron Hughes in Iraq

A Different Kind of Rolling Thunder: VVAW's West Coast Tour

Horace Coleman

This was no reunion tour.

VVAW rolled through coastal California five deep.

In Long Beach, National Coordinators Barry Romo and Marty Webster, joined by Willie Hager, George Johnson and Jan Ruhman were hosted by Pat Alviso and Jeff Merrick, from the local MFSO chapter. Jack Finley, VFP chapter president, photographed the event and arranged videotaping. Webster and Romo spoke to an enthusiastic crowd. A lively Q&A session with the five followed.

There were also events in Berkeley (the musical group Johnson's part of, Annie and the Vets, and Country Joe McDonald performed), San Francisco (Annie and the Vets performed) and Camarillo.

In San Diego, Webster talked about organizing and Romo about the Afghanistan war, another item on Obama's overloaded plate. In a rump session led by Ruhman, goals, cooperation, coordination, tactics and techniques were discussed.

"Patriots" today wave the flag while doing little else, applaud themselves while failing veterans. This makes the people who do positive things more important: pilots who reunite military members recuperating from war injuries with their families, groups that aid homeless vets, have stand-downs, help military families, and hold camps where the children of deployed or KIA parents can decompress.

Having a professional Army pleased the general public, and caused multiple tours in the war zone, high PTSD and suicide rates. Having no war taxes kept the financial costs of war invisible. Banning photos of flag draped coffins covered up the ultimate cost while wounded warriors were housed in moldy rooms at Walter Reed hospital. Poorly supervised no bid contractors produced work that electrocuted troops in shower rooms, built dilapidated facilities Iraqis refused to use and let Blackwater operatives act like Blackwater operatives.

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National Coordinator Notes

Barry Romo

First many thanks to the people on the West Coast, VVAW, VFP, MFSO and IVAW from Seattle, the San Francisco Bay Area and San Diego whose generosity and hard work made our trip possible. Our whirlwind tour down the coast covered 5 cities and hundreds of miles. With lively debate, great music and late night sessions we managed to hammer out some details of our future work. At one event where 5 VVAW people spoke, Jan Ruhman pointed out to the crowd that we had 4 different positions and that that was the great thing about VVAW that you could have different opinions and still remain together. This happens when you have programs for change and not just fights over intellectual purity.

One thing for sure, everyone is glad to see Bush gone and Obama, a man about whom one person said "It is a pleasure to have a president that can put four sentences together in to a paragraph," in. I have been involved with civil rights, justice and peace for almost 40 years and it is such a treat having this person in office. In the Bay Area one of our long time members, Chukia Lawton, a community organizer for 50 years and widow of Gary Lawton, thought Obama's victory was a culmination of their work. Unfortunately a number of friends just can't seem to be happy. It's like they don't know a good thing when they see it. I admit all of them are white but for god's sake be happy. Maybe we are lucky here in Chicago. One of our great friends and reformers Mayor Harold Washington, allowed us a preview of what progressive politics in power could be.

Wars "end" but the casualties continue. VVAW could not forget this with friends dying before their time from Agent Orange and PTSD. We haven't forgotten that the real victims were the Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians. Buried bombs and mines still cripple some but even more hideous; children are still being born with birth defects because of defoliation after more than 40 years. VVAW along with other vets groups was able to sue. The Vietnamese were never given this right and the US military has never shared scientific information that could help. We must do more than picket or demonstrate. We have to get legislation to allow basic compensation for this deliberate chemical poisoning. We are working with some congresspersons on this issue.

This will be harder than our PTSD and Agent Orange struggles. It means justice. We owe a blood debt to the Vietnamese people and we have to offer more than sympathy or anger. In the 70's VVAW and no other veterans group, in conjunction with a decent President got PTSD recognized as a service connected disability and got vets outreach centers established to help deal with it. Almost a 100 VVAW people went to work at the vet's centers; people like Jack McCloskey in Haight-Ashbury and Dave Curry in Alabama. We have to revive that spirit.

In Iraq, we should demand that our legislators help remove the only laws leftover from the Saddam Hussein regime. One of our good friends Aaron Hughes just returned from a US labor trip to Iraq where he met with regional trade unionists. They told him that unions were banned in Iraq: not allowed to organize or negotiate. It seems to me that VVAW can play an important role. We have to do more than just protest but must really organize and apply pressure for the repeal of these anti-labor laws.

Finally I think that VVAW in every area has to help IVAW at this critical juncture. I don't mean just telling stories about the good old days or giving speeches. But by helping them raise funds, setting up speaking gigs, passsing out literature, etc. Go to ivaw.org to find out more.

Barry Romo is one of eight VVAW national coordinators.

Editorial Collective

Barry Romo, Joe Miller
Charlie Branson, Ellie Shunas
Jeff Machota, Bill Branson

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Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

To the best of my recollection this past November is the first time I ever voted for the winner in a presidential election. I've voted for losing Democrats and third party candidates, and sometimes I've left that spot blank and voted only for local candidates. Once when I did that, an astonished poll watcher chased me to the door to tell me that I forgot to vote for president. So much for the privacy of the election booth.

So, I voted for Obama in spite of his professed interest in escalating the Afghan/Pakistan War. Past presidents have taken office during a war and remained heavily involved in that war just because we were already in the situation.The only way Obama will have success in his foreign policy would be to deviate from the practices of some of these predecessors. In Afghanistan that would mean de-escalating. That would mean acknowledging that the price of that war is not worth the prize of winning. That would mean suppressing the macho. That would mean walking away. We got involved there because the 9-11 planners found refuge there. Maybe an incoming president would think that this is enough reason to fight there, but Obama should think outside the box. US involvement did not work early on when it should have at Tora Bora. Now the price is too high.

Obama's big problem is, of course, the economy. In past recessions you always knew the recession would end and things would return to normal. Lots of people had good jobs, and once inventories were depleted, they could go back to work at a good wage producing the goods they used to produce before the hard times. Now it seems that there are relatively fewer of those good jobs for people to go back to. Many of those jobs are now in some other country. Others won't pay as well as they used to because the companies and corporations can get away with paying lower wages. Much is still manufactured in the US, but globalization has also siphoned off much.

I wonder if this recession is going to change the US outlook towards war and foreign policy. If you listen to the sounds of the economy you hear a giant sucking sound. That sound is dollar bills in the whirlpool of these great sewers called Iraq and Afghanistan. It used to be that you could fight a war, and the cost could be absorbed by a strong economy. Today's economy can't absorb a medium sized war. One day the strain will become too much and we will have to give up fighting these kind of wars.

Throughout history empires have risen and fallen. We may be talking about the end of empire here. This is not to say that there will be some kind of moral retribution for meddling in the affairs of most countries in the world. It is not to say that Americans will descend en masse into poverty. As long as we are surrounded by two oceans and two friendly countries, and as long as we have lots of capital and resources and manufacturing we have the capability to get along just fine. We just won't be able to handle this empire thing. What happens then could take any number of different forms.

There was the Roman Empire, which fell apart. It didn't fall that far, however. Like, would you rather live in Italy, or say, the Dominican Republic? Greece or Somalia? The British settled down nicely after their empire ended. Under Margaret Thatcher its working class got slapped down hard, but still its two centuries of empire turned it into a country that has some wealth and services for its people. The Soviet Union on the other hand has degenerated into a country of some very rich people in the midst of some very poor people. These things can go both ways.

Ah, the Soviet Union. Many Americans like to brag about bringing down that empire. To over simplify matters, what happened there was that it tried to keep up militarily with the US, and that broke the bank. Is this similar to the current US situation in which we are approaching the point where the US economy will not be able to handle endless major wars? Visions of empire are the last thing we need now. If Obama or future presidents want to keep this empire going, something's got to give. There's a limit to how much we go into debt to finance our operations. The American people have known better times, and there's a limit to how much we will draw down. We won't become Indonesia.

Our economy is not going to bounce all the way back, and every major war we fight will hold back recovery and economic advancement. At some point foreign policy will have to change, either brought about by demand from the citizenry, or, however unlikely, wisdom from the ivory tower. Empires fall, and I expect ours to follow the pattern. This recession is serious and should cause this government to seriously re-evaluate basic foreign policy premises. I know there's no accounting for stupidity, but one can always hope.

* * *

One additional thought about the Surge in Iraq where by the sending of 30,000 additional troops allegedly turned the tide and greatly reduced the casualties. The additional 30,000 troops did no such thing. Other factors were involved, such as involving the Sunnis in the economical and political sphere and compromising (temporarily) the Al-Sadr Shiites.

All this is beside the point. The success or failure of the Surge should be judged in terms of its real purpose which is in the world of propaganda. Over the years Americans have been proud to send troops in harm's way to supposedly help the less fortunate find freedom and democracy like we have. The only requirement is that we be successful in our mission. If not there is disillusionment. So, when LBJ said there was a light at the end of the tunnel and only a few more troops were needed, he got his troops. It blew up in his face. In Iraq, at the beginning it was said just a few more troops were needed. And the war dragged on after a couple of Surges.

The American people now question the wisdom of a few more troops in these wars. And that presents a problem for American leaders who want a few more troops to be sent into dubious battle. Now that there has been alleged success with the Surge, they can have an easier time convincing the next generation that it is good to send a few more troops. Thirty thousand more are headed for Afghanistan this Spring. In the Fall maybe we can send a brigade or two. The talk of the Surge and its success has nothing to do with reality. It has to do with greasing the skids to send more troops to wherever.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author and VVAW member in the Chicago chapter.

VVAW marching in D.C. on March 21, 2009

Notes From the Boonies

Paul Wisovaty

Joe Miller and I recently attended a viewing of the documentary *Soldiers of Conscience*. It focuses on four active duty Iraq veterans who refused to continue to fight in that war. Three had applied for conscientious objector status; the fourth opted out based upon his objection specifically to the Iraq War. Whether or not one agrees with their positions, it is impossible to hear their stories without admiring their courage. The film's producer, Luna Films, states that it was made "with official permission from the US Army," and I am certain that that is true. The film features interviews with several Army personnel allowing them to express their views, almost all of which are in disagreement with the beliefs of the CO vets. The anti-war vets get much more air time but the pro-war vets are allowed to make their cases, and in the case of one officer, articulately so.

Opening interviews with the anti-war vets were hauntingly reminiscent of the beginning of *Vietnam Soldiers' Stories*, a Champaign-Urbana-based PBS documentary made about ten years ago which featured me and Barry Romo. All thirteen of us in that film started out saying pretty much the same things: we grew up with John Wayne and Randolph Scott war movies, our dads and uncles fought in WW II, and by God we'd rather kill a Commie than make love to Tuesday Weld. (Iraq vets will have no idea what I just said.) Then one day we – just like the vets in this film – found ourselves plucked out of Boonies Township High School and slam-dunked into an armored personnel carrier in a war zone, and everything that our formerly iconic adult role models had told us made a hell of a lot less sense.

To the Army's credit, two of three CO requests were granted. Other than being recipients of a lot of very unpleasant peer pressure from their fellow soldiers while the applications were pending, they were not officially sanctioned. The third CO applicant was court-martialed and imprisoned, but only after he had refused to be redeployed. The Army called it "intentionally missing movement." It should have been mitigating that he was a ten-year active duty vet. As this is tantamount to having been drafted five times, one would think that that would have counted for something. The fourth soldier, having served honorably for one tour, also refused to return and went into hiding. During this time he appeared on *60 Minutes* and was interviewed by Dan Rather. He eventually turned himself in, was court-martialed then released early for good behavior after serving 9 of 12 months incarceration. He stated that, even as he walked into prison, he had never felt freer in his entire life.

I suppose that this may be said about any movie or book review, but it is impossible for me (or Roger Ebert or the *New York Times*) to give you any real appreciation of this film absent your seeing it yourself. The testimonies of the vets are articulate and compelling. Speaking personally, I would love for my daughter to have married any one of these guys (no disrespect to my son-in-law, who will probably wind up reading this). I would love to include a couple of dozen very moving quotes from them, but Jeff Machota tells me that he would like to have room in this issue for at least a couple of other articles. Being thus handicapped, I can only refer you back to the first sentence of this paragraph.

Both vets who applied for CO status while in Iraq were granted that request. Arguments put forth by Army representatives were not without substance. This was not an instance reminiscent of an old *All In The Family* episode, in which Archie Bunker is chosen by a liberal radio station to be interviewed as a representative of the National Rifle Association. Excepting the First Sergeant who described firing 50-caliber machine guns as "a real hoot" (actually, it kind of was) and an officer who was trying only minimally to conceal her outright contempt for conscientious objectors, the Army reps presented their positions admirably. One of them offered the quote that "people sleep comfortably in their beds at night because of men willing to do violence on their behalf." Having been in law enforcement for thirty years, I was familiar with that quote, and I understand it.

Perhaps the most compelling quote came from an Army Major with a Master's degree in philosophy. Referring to the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan, he posed the following question: What would the Good Samaritan have done had he happened upon the scene an hour earlier, while the physical assault of the traveler was taking place? Would he have intervened to try to stop the assault? If necessary, would he have gone so far as to have taken the life of someone inflicting potentially lethal harm upon an innocent person? As may be inferred, the Major views combat, in "justifiable" wars, as calling upon soldiers to do just that.

As may be apparent, I am getting in way over my head here. I had to use spell check just to figure out how to spell "philosophy." *Soldiers of Conscience* is an excellent documentary, and easily deserves the multiple awards which it has won. And I do have a plan for it.

My plan is to approach the Tuscola High School principal, with whom I have a pretty good working relationship, and ask him about the possibility of introducing this film to his seniors next fall. As they will then be less than a year away from entering the adult world, this is definitely a film which they should see. I cannot imagine that their viewing this documentary would not engender serious discussion – and disagreement – concerning the subject of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and more importantly as human beings. As one of the Iraq CO vets observed, this country, through an act of the Continental Congress, passed a law creating conscientious objector status in 1775. What this meant – and continues to mean – is that "spiritual law trumps legal law."

As it should.

Paul Wisovaty is a member of VVAW. He lives in Tuscola, Illinois, where he works as a probation officer. He was in Vietnam with the US Army 9th Division in 1968.

Aplo Lebn-Number One

Randy Ludacer

The morning of July 20, 1969 in Saigon was like most other summer mornings, hot and steamy. Traffic was already beginning to snarl, cycles and little blue and yellow Renault taxicabs competing for space as young girls clad in the inevitable Ao Dai maneuvered their Honda motor scooters in and out of traffic,defying traffic laws and common sense. The 716th MP's were on patrol, causally seeing nothing while taking in everything with a glance. Pedestrians crowded around pushcart vendors selling soup chinoise and a local variety of a hero sandwich, all before 8 AM. In short, a normal day.

But there was a buzz in the air as many Vietnamese approached Americans, smiling and with a nod said "Aplo Lebn, number one." Unable to decipher this ambiguous greeting most round eyes simply said, "Caam Ung" Vietnamese for thank you. The repetition of this strange greeting became baffling until a friend said "It's about the astronauts, their saying "Apollo Eleven, Number One." High approval in Vietnamese argot. It was the day Armstrong walked on the moon and for that day the Vietnamese held all Americans in awe, viewed them with wonder. Temporarily, at least, all other Vietnamese-American concerns were held in abeyance while they marveled at the people who had actually reached and walked on the moon.

Vietnamese folklore and legends abound with stories about the moon. There is even a moon festival where little rice cakes called moon cakes are given to children. It's celebrated throughout the country. One of the persistent tales is about a boy, Cuoi, who flew to the moon on a banyan tree. Another about a benign rabbit who lived there but was willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. One told of a prince who flew to the moon on the back of a butterfly.

Make no mistake, in Vietnam the moon was big stuff and now the Americans were walking on it. Aplo Lebn, number one! "Choi oy!"

Randy Ludacer is a retired attorney living in Lake Placid. He previously served as Legal Advisor for the US AID Mission in Vietnam and as County Attorney in Monroe County,FL.

VVAW Kentuckiana Commemorates Sixth Anniversary of the Iraq War

Harold Trainer

Certain dates are etched in our memories: December 7th, 1941, Pearl Harbor; September 11th, 2001, attack on the Twin Towers; March 19th, 2003, the date the United States invaded Iraq in an illegal and immoral war. A war declared because Iraq supposedly had weapons of mass destruction. There were none. Since then we've learned that the Bush-Cheney administration was determined to declare war on Iraq no matter what the cost or reason. So much for the United States being greeted as liberators, cheap oil paying for the war, and the war lasting only weeks rather than years. Instead, six years later 4500 plus brave military have died, thousands more have been seriously wounded and one fifth of the Iraqi population dead or displaced and the cost is in the trillions. All borrowed. A debt that is being passed on to our grandchildren. We were lied to. March 19th is a shameful blot on our country's history. Let us never forget this date.

Since March 2003, members of the Kentuckiana Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Louisville Peace Action Community have consistently opposed the war and occupation. We have written letters to the editor, communicated with Congress and the President. We marched through the streets of Louisville and in Washington DC. We painted countless anti-war signs and banners. We placed hundreds of pairs of boots on the courthouse steps and strung clotheslines of t-shirts and displayed thousands of white flags to symbolize the unspeakable loss of thousands of American and Iraqi lives.

Congress failed to correct this situation and in fact aided and abetted the president by consistently and enthusiastically supporting and funding the war. Protests and objections were drowned out by the accusations of being unpatriotic and inciting our nation with the fear of terrorism. Clearly, the beating of the war drum of fear and terror minimized dissent. And, in order to ensure there was a minimum of dissent for this unjust war, the President and Congress made this a war where only our military and families suffered the effects. The great majority of Americans were never affected by this difficult war. There were no sacrifices, no tax increase or draft. They were isolated from the grief and pain by a President who wanted to minimize the criticism of a nation motivated by his mantra of we have everything to fear including fear itself.

Now again on March 19th 2009, the Sixth Anniversary of the Iraq War, close to a hundred members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Louisville Peace Action Community gathered at the Jefferson County Courthouse and displayed banners, signs and symbols of this tragic war. Members spoke, including famed activist Fr. Bourgeois, founder of School of Americas Watch. Symbolic music played. The press covered the event and interviewed veterans and non veterans regarding the war and why they were here. There was radio and television coverage of this event.

Speakers addressed attendees and spoke of the war being a huge mistake if not an outright lie. A VVAW representative spoke and said that there were no valid reasons for the war and when this

Harold Trainer

became known Bush changed the reasons. There were no WMD, links to Al Qaeda, or an imminent threat. The President and senior military leaders executed the war poorly resulting in the deaths of thousands of our troops. The government cannot even properly care for the many wounded veterans from the war. We are outflanked in Afghanistan while the Taliban threat increases. We are trapped there. Osama is still free. A trillion plus dollars, borrowed, and military lives have been spent. Afghanistan was neglected and the Taliban threat grew so we are now surrounded in a country financed by drugs. A mountainous country the size of Texas with 39 million people next to one of the most populous and dangerous countries in the world, Pakistan.

Our brave military men and women give our country a blank check. The government and American people must ensure that the check is not cashed for a war which is a mistake. If you want to thank a veteran, ensure they are not put in harm's way for no reason or a lie like they have been in Iraq.

Withdraw from Iraq, leave Afghanistan and demilitarize our country so that other instruments of national power are used to achieve our national objectives rather than war.

War is not the answer.

Harold Trainer is a retired USAF Major who lives in Prospect, Kentucky. He is an adjunct instructor of business at Kentucky Community and Technical College in Louisville. Johanna Camenisch, Judy Munro Leighton and Kate Cunningham of the Louisville Peace Action Community contributed to this article.

Members of Kentuckiana VVAW.

Utah VVAW in the Classroom

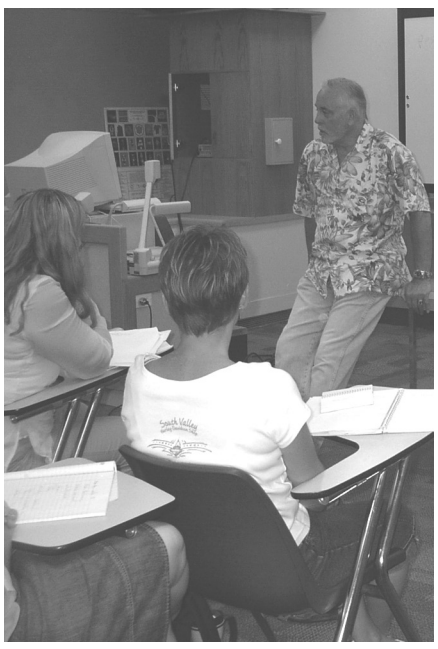
Aaron Davis

Last fall VVAW members Rick Miller and Larry Chadwick along with Vietnam veterans Dr. Robert Littlehale and Lewis Downey traveled to Orem, Utah to give students at the Walden Charter School their perspectives and share their experiences about Vietnam. According to Dr. Robert Littlehale who coordinated the visit, the four have had previous panel experience on the topic of the human costs of war. "There were 60 students and the faculty were held rapt by our response to their questions," he stated. He was impressed by the feedback from the students of deep gratitude and their willingness to listen and ask questions."There is a healing that comes with speaking our truth, even if it brings pathos to the heart," he continued. When told by Class Instructor Eric Beecroft that the students had decided to adopt an Iraqi family, and help with their adapting to life in America, Dr. Littlehale exclaimed," I admire the idealism that fractured and damaged folks like me often have missplaced or been transformed into cynicism and skepticism... it reminds me that the future resides in the passion, romance and innocence of our young...there is hope eternal," he concluded.

Beecroft thanked the vets and said,"it was painfully and profoundly sad, but incredibly necessary." His students views changed so drastically on "glorious combat and justified violence... the idea of what it means to go to war... became real to them," he stated. "We decided as a class to adopt a refuge Iraqi family as a long term service commitment instead of writing a paper or some dumb test," he concluded.

Mission Accomplished, aye, aye sir!

Aaron Davis is VVAW contact in Utah and former VFP Chapter 118 president. His 18 years active and reserve marine NCO and Army Officer service preceded his organizing and Military Counseling Service.



Dr. Robert Littlehale speaks about his experiences in Vietnam to students in Utah.

Report from Georgia VVAW

Michael Burke

Atlanta VVAW members have been instrumental in forming the new Georgia Veterans Alliance, based in Atlanta at the American Friends Service Committee, since early last year. Members and friends of Veterans groups thus far taking part in GVA's 2009 agenda include Iraq Afghanistan Veterans of America, Iraq Veterans Against the War, National Association for Black Veterans, Unitarian Universalist Veterans Alliance, Veterans For Peace, Veterans Heart Georgia, Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Vietnam Veterans of America.

GVA is heavily involved in a before-during-after program. The "before" focuses on high school students being suckered into today's military. The "during" focuses on GIs once they have been recruited and given up many of their human rights. The "after" focuses on soldiers being deployed to combat zones, those returning stateside for reassignment and potential redeployment, along with soldiers enroute during R&R leave.

The "during" part of the GVA mission has been especially gratifying and takes place at Hartsfield International Airport in Atlanta, where members meet and greet soldiers in transit, pass along encouragement and a GI Rights Hotline card. The leadership force of GVA is a liaison board comprised of one member from each of the foregoing veterans' groups. Members and friends have also been quite busy with the "before" segment of the three-prong agenda, which consists primarily of advising students on high school campuses, where they've been tagged "high-priority-vulnerability" by the military recruiting programs -- most often schools with large numbers of Latinos, Blacks and other minority groups, including undocumented aliens who often are promised US citizenship along with money and college. Here GVA works hand-in-hand with AFSC, Grandmothers For Peace and other local activist groups deeply involved in the national truth-in-military-recruiting movement.

The "after" part comes when a soldier has been discharged and needs help with his or her VA claim, homelessness, medical and mental health care and marriage counseling. GVA presently represents about fifty members and friends who are active in one or more of these three-prong missions. GVA graciously invites input from veterans across the country, especially those involved in counter-recruiting.

Michael Burke is the VVAW Atlanta Contact.

Kent State Update

Bruce Hyland

It is now 39 years since rifle shots rang out on the Kent State University campus. On May 4th 1970 shots fired by the Ohio National Guard killed 4 students, and wounded 9 others at Kent State. Most of our older members vividly remember this tragic injustice, some were there the day it happened. Our younger members have most likely learned of these events by their own study initiatives, or by hearing stories. One of the best ways to learn of this important historical event is to attend a yearly commemoration at the Kent State campus.

Some veterans of military service who were present at the shooting helped provide first aid to the shooting victims. The reckless response with deadly force not only killed and wounded students. It endangered faculty, campus visitors, other guard unit members, and anyone else in the range of the powerful M1 Garand rifles. The actions of some members of the Ohio National Guard, and decision making of Elected Officials is a clear reminder of the need for continued education concerning this historic event. It is also one reason why the tragic Jackson State University(Jackson MS) shootings which occurred on May 14-15th 1970 are included in each commemoration.

Wounded students and many others present the day of the shooting continue to attend the yearly commemorations along with family and friends. A large number of our fellow citizens visit the Kent State shooting site throughout each year. Many VVAW members have supported past student and citizen actions at Kent State (the gym struggle) including commemorations, and continue to do so. This dedicated movement of wounded students, university faculty members, and present day student activists work tirelessly to educate all who seek knowledge concerning the historic events of May 1-4 1970 at Kent State. The May 4 Visitor Center will provide a central location to consolidate this information. It is not only good, but right that VVAW has provided support for a Kent State May 4 Visitor Center.

Bruce Hyland, Infantryman, Honor Guard, E/1/3 TOG.

Militarism Must Be Conquered

Ben Chitty

Long-time VVAW member Ben Chitty was invited to participate in a celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1967 Riverside speech against the war, produced by the Village Playback Theatre as a benefit for Pax Christi. He was asked to address in particular the issue of militarism. The event was staged on January 25th at Judson Memorial Church in New York City.

In his speech at Riverside Church, Dr. King spoke of moving to "the high ground of a firm dissent based upon the mandate of conscience and the reading of history." I'm no preacher, and I'm not going to talk about conscience. But I do know something about history.

Now maybe this is a little ironic. The war Dr. King came to oppose in 1967 did finally end eight years later, and without any of the true revolutions he hoped would stop the war. In fact, just as he predicted, we went on to repeat the war, over and over and over again – Afghanistan, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Panama, Kuwait, Somalia, Haiti, Serbia, Afghanistan again, Iraq.

A little more irony -- during his campaign Barack Obama quoted Dr. King's Riverside speech when he explained he was running for President because of "the fierce urgency of now." Then in his inauguration speech, when he listed the people whose labor and sacrifice made our prosperity and freedom possible, he said, "For us they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg, Normandy and Khe Sanh."

Stirring words, but Khe Sanh? The idea that the marines at Khe Sanh fought to give us prosperity and freedom is laughable. You could make a better case for Fallujah.

Saigon fell in 1975. Over the years since then people have said many things about Vietnam which are not true. People said we could have won the war, if only we had avoided some mistakes. People said we were fighting for democracy, and even if we lost we were doing the right thing. People said the war was over, so we should forget about it and just move on.

None of these are true.

Mistakes were made, but to win the war we had to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese. To persuade them we had to kill them. We were good at killing, and the more we killed, the closer we came to losing the war.

What we called democracy was actually a brutal and corrupt puppet regime we installed in Saigon in 1954, and followed with a succession of military dictatorships after 1963. Our country's best and brightest orchestrated the American war in Vietnam, but it was never about democracy.

Saying the war is over passes over our failure to deliver on the Paris Peace Accord promises of aid for reconstruction, and over decades of embargo, and over the continuing casualties – the Vietnamese still being maimed and killed by the bombs and mines and toxins we left behind.

But more important, saying the war is over lets us obscure the fact that we are still the same kind of society, the same kind of country, the same kind of people, who send our sons and daughters to faraway lands to kill the people who live there until they agree to do what we say.

Which brings me to militarism, one of the giant triplets which Dr. King warned had to be conquered before we could end the threat of wars like Vietnam. Other folks are here to talk about materialism and racism – I guess I'm the designated hitter for militarism.

By militarism Dr. King meant more than misdirected economic investments. Militarism means we use military violence to solve social and economic problems, not just wars to protect property like in Southeast Asia and Central America, but wars for scarce resources, like in the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa.

Militarism encourages individual violence. If Dr. King were to speak about militarism today, he would surely discuss the role of misogyny. In today's Army one in three servicewomen suffer sexual harassment, abuse, or rape, and domestic violence occurs in military families at more than twice the civilian rate.

Militarism breeds cynicism. Consider our weapons. In Vietnam we used the defoliant Agent Orange, though we knew it was toxic and persistent. In the first Gulf War we used depleted uranium, and now more than a third of the Americans who served in Desert Storm are disabled or dead, and not from enemy action. Now we experiment with DIME ordnance – dense inert metal explosives which shred flesh with metal powder making medical treatment useless.

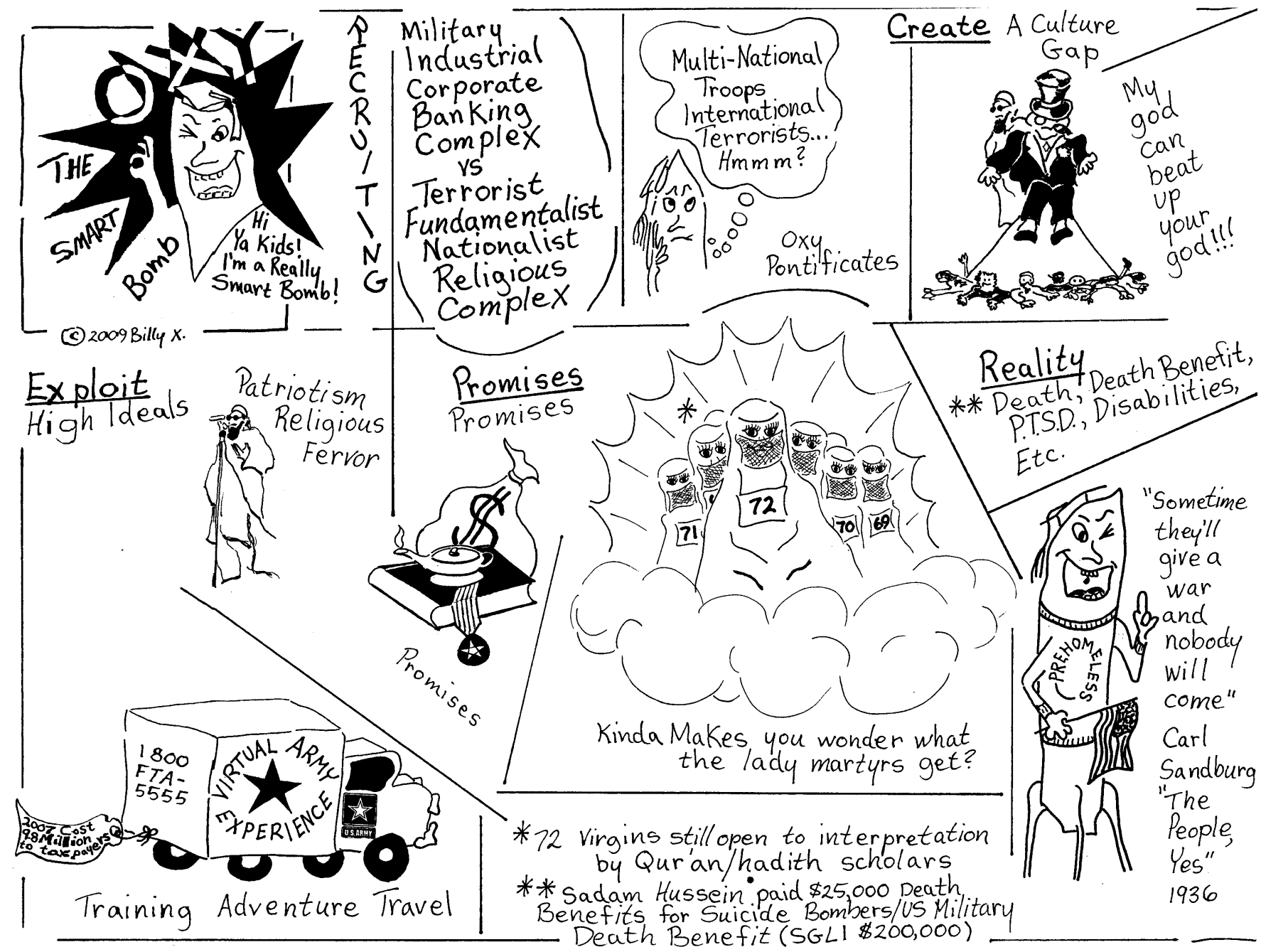
To make your own soldiers sick, to delight in the deaths of innocents – how much more cynical can you get? Here's how. We torture enemy combatants even though experts in interrogation tell us that torture produces unreliable intelligence. But we can't stop, lest we be thought too weak to protect the homeland. That political deployment of militarism may be the most depraved cynicism of all. The President won election in 2004 based on the urgency of a war we could have stopped a year before, a war we did not even have to fight. Between Karl Rove's campaign to re-elect a war-time president and Richard Nixon's use of American POWs to justify extending and expanding the war in Indochina, what's to choose?

I started with a comment about the irony in President Obama's use of a phrase from the Riverside speech when his inauguration speech so clearly misconstrued the nature of the war Dr. King opposed. That irony reminds me of something else. I fought in Democratic wars. Lyndon Johnson was president when I first went to Vietnam in September 1966, and still in office when I left for the last time in November 1968. George W. Bush was an incompetent commander-in-chief, a disaster as a decider, but the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq have been ratified again and again by the people we keep electing to serve our interests. So the problem is not a few bad apples in the White House and the Pentagon, though Rumsfeld and Cheney were pretty rotten. The problem is the kind of politics we practice, the kind of nation we try to be, the kind of people we are. It's in us – the people – where militarism, like materialism and racism – must be conquered.

Since Dr. King's speech in 1967 the stakes have been raised. If you think the Cold War was bad, try the Global War on Terror. If you think the rising tide of revolutionary demands was a challenge, try climate change. Speaking truth to power is not enough – we have to save ourselves from ourselves for ourselves.

Let me end with one more observation from history. When you work for revolutionary change, you always lose. You lose again and again, right up to the very moment that you win.

Per Odman and Ben Chitty at Vets Day Parade in Manhattan, November 11, 2008.



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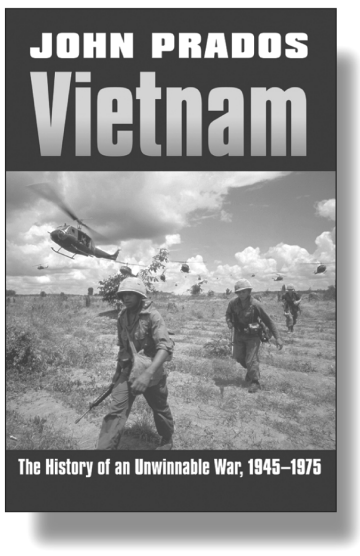

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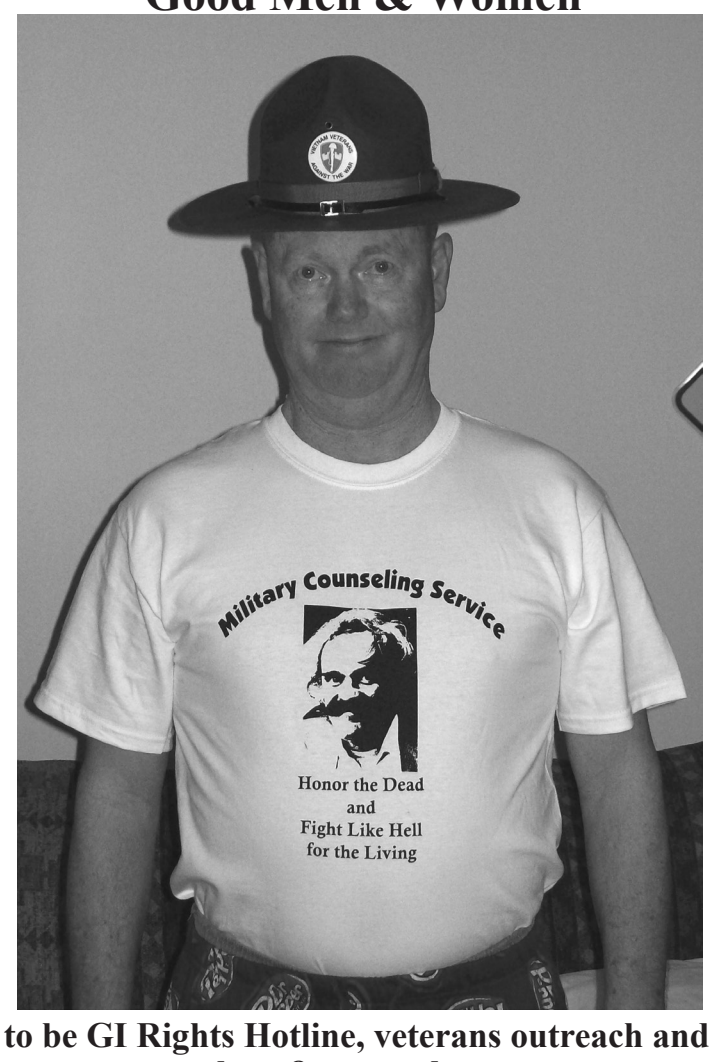

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Arlington West—Huntington Beach, CA

Horace Coleman

Huntington Beach, California (also known as Surf City) attracts about 1.6 million visitors a year. People from all over the world go there.

An Arlington West Memorial is erected at a popular strip of beach there on the first Sunday of every month by the Jim Brown chapter of Veterans For Peace. No, not the football player; a veteran from one of the nation's most conservative places,Orange County, California.

VFPers and volunteers unload crosses, easels, signs and literature. They rake a patch of sand smooth, align and erect rows of crosses, then set up flags from each military branch at the "graveyard's" corners.

Canopies are put up. Display stands are erected for pamphlets, leaflets, sweat and t-shirts, books and DVDs.

The memorial is close to a parking lot and a paved path. A strip of eateries and rental shops are a just a short distance away.

Some people take pictures. Others read the obituaries or look at the pictures some crosses have. Some browse the display stands. Or leave a donation or ask questions. Others are oblivious or pretend they don't see.

There are bicycle riders and bicycle surreys, seating four, with steering wheels going by. Parents with young children. Couples. People walking dogs (ranging from pocket pooches to Great Danes). Kite fliers. Women with perfect tans and bodies and minimal bikinis. Studly fellows with "six packs." Packs of friends, tweeners and teenagers. Surfers and swimmers. Skaters and skate boarders. Boogey and skim boarders. People playing beach volley ball. Joggers. Young marines from Camp Pendleton and Twentynine Palms.

On a recent first Sunday, there was a wide range of people viewing the memorial—as usual.

A homeless, toothless, old Jesus freak wandered by. He was hungry, for food, some human contact, attention and shade. He talked some, prayed for God to get those dirty Arabs, stole a cross and left.

An ex-Blackwater operative, formerly in Special Ops (Plan Columbia) and his flight attendant girl friend come up. She said that when military personnel were on board, she announces it over the public address system and the passengers clap. On one flight, though, there was silence after that announcement was made. Until she said "That was your cue to applaud!" He told us Americans in Iraq got kidney stones from the chemicals in imported water and mentioned his PTSD.

Mark Ruter, president of the Orange County VFP chapter, is a plumber, surfer, and Desert Storm veteran. He told some young marines to avoid body armor that had been hit by small arms. He also warned them about depleted uranium.

A man was angry at the memorial—under the impression that more people had died in the 9/11 Twin Towers, Pennsylvania plane crash, and Pentagon attack than in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. "What about the people in Pennsylvania?" he ranted.

An *Associated Press* story by Sean Alfano published on Sept. 22, 2006 was headlined "War Casualties Pass 9/11 Death Toll." In 2006!!

That story's second paragraph said "The latest milestone for a country at war came Friday without commemoration. It came without the precision of knowing who was the 2,974th to die in conflict. The terrorist attacks killed 2,973 victims in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania." Attitude trumps information for some people.

A young Navy vet stops by. She's scuffling for work. She thanks us for the memorial and says she's moving to Israel. A woman says she doesn't trust Obama. I ask "Who else is there?" then say "You have to watch him too!"

In a lull between "customers" I tell a Nam vet, Ranger, VFPer about some of the weird projects I was involved with in Nam. Among them were low level light TV assisted hunter-killer aircraft teams, and all weather night bombing missions using TACON/DME positions as release and aiming points.

He tells me about having lunch stateside with the infamous Col. Bo Gritz and describes some of the hush hush equipment Gritz used on missions searching for US POWs in Southeast Asia. There are no secrets, just limited distribution of information

In between there's a short chapter meeting, more conversations with, and explanations to, questioning passersby. Chit chat and conversations between and among chapter members and the people who have come to help or shoot the breeze. There are exchanges of announcements, comments about local, state and national events, politics and economies.

We honor the fallen warriors; not misconceived and misguided wars.

Horace Coleman was an Air Force air traffic controller / intercept director in Vietnam (1967-68). He also served in Tactical Air Command, Pacific Air Command and North American Air Defense. He speaks at grade schools, high schools and churches and lives in Long Beach, CA.

Mr. Limbaugh Learns From History

Behind the Red Door at Franklin Mills Mall

SANDY FULTON

What's the "Army Experience?" According to the website of the Army Experience Center at Franklin Mills Mall, it offers "the latest in technology, interactivity and gaming. . . an unparalleled interactive experience, designed and built by the world's premier land force." "Land force?" Last I heard, the Army was a military arm of the US government, the same outfit that euphemized the word "kill" to "take out" and more recently to "neutralize."

This high-tech, slick, ultra-expensive Army Experience Center offers young kids, including those coming from the nearby skateboard park and food court, a wonderful experience in learning the various ways to do away with an enemy by practicing vicarious killing—whoops, "neutralizing"—in gory video games. The whole Center is a game palace for death and destruction, the latest huckstering device for recruiting military cannon fodder.

But the military recruiters who run it (disguised in civilian-looking jogger suits) think of themselves as educators. Using tax money taken away from the federal budget for public education, they "educate" the young about exotic locales, the cushy military life, and the unlikely chance of being trained in something which might be worthwhile in a civilian career. Besides all these good things, the recruiters go into schools and poor neighborhoods—not to recruit, of course! Heaven forbid. No, they "educate" poorly performing students in a few basic skills like reading, drop-outs in how to pass a GED test, and both in the Army entrance exam. But they don't educate the young about endless fear, sleep deprivation, rape and murder of women soldiers, inadequate armor and equipment, electrocution from bad wiring, soldiers on roadsides with their legs or heads blown away, vermin, blasting heat and withering cold, food poisoning, lack of pure drinking water, bad officering, bad shelter, hostile stares from people who resent being invaded and violated. They say nothing of the rising epidemic of veteran and active duty suicides, or PTSD, head trauma, paraplegia, missing eyes and arms, and other lifelong crippling wounds. The curriculum used by the recruiters never mentions any of these.

So a few planners decided to bring the missing pieces of learning to the educators and pay a call on the Army Experience Center at Franklin Mills Mall. VVAW's local contact, Executive Director of Delaware Valley Veterans for America (DVVFA), and VFP member Bill Perry, scouted out the mall three times, took surreptitious photos for location purposes, and a whole lot of co-planners began networking together. IVAW, VVAW, several VFP chapters from Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey, Brandywine Peace Community, World Can't Wait, Grannies for Peace, and groups from as far away as DC and New York City responded to each other's phone calls and emails and came up with a plan. Some would come to the Center early and try to see what was in the videos. Others would go inside and "freeze"—stand still for several minutes.

A date was set for the gathering, Monday, February 16, and the planners began going out to a few others who could keep it secret. There were a couple of other rules besides keeping the action confidential: wear no political gear on outer clothing and don't use the demonstration to do a "promo" of a particular group. The sole purpose was to make a planned, collective effort to save the kids inside the Army Experience Center and get the word out to high school journalists.

As Secretary of DVVFA, I learned of it quickly from Bill and wanted to get in on the action. I'd been a Vietnam era recruiter and had resigned from the Navy because I couldn't stand the hypocrisy of recruiting. In the words of my resignation letter, I objected "to US foreign policy, specifically to the war in Vietnam." Since I'll be 73 next month I may have been the oldest one coming to this demo at the Army Experience Center.

One of the youngest was young Jesse Hamilton, Iraq veteran and former Army drill Sergeant. He wasn't the only IVAW Iraq veteran at this action, and he also belongs to DVVFA, which, I'm proud to say, displayed an age spread of about 50 years last Monday. DVVFA turned out nine members for this event. Some of us have been active in other peace vet organizations, too, and here we are in alpha order: Sam Adams (Army, also VVAW), Pete Brunner (Marines, also VVAW), Robert Dennen (Navy), Sandy Fulton (Navy, also VVAW, VFP), Jesse Hamilton (Army, also IVAW), Al Kovnat (Army, also VVAW, VFP), Bill Perry (Army, also VVAW, VFP), Nancy Smith (Associate, also of VFP), Ray Smith (Army, also President of South Jersey Chapter of VFP).

Surprisingly since it was a work-day, about fifty of us, mostly young, showed up between 11:00 AM and noon at sprawling Franklin Mills Mall, finding our way to the correct building thanks to Bill's directions and photos. He'd furnished a photo of the mall's huge Red Door, which (like the other enormous mall doors, Aqua, Green, Orange and Yellow) were conspicuous a mile away. Inside the Red Door I sauntered into the food court, where we were gathering. Final plans were made. In the bathrooms we removed our jackets and acquired signs reading WAR IS NOT A GAME taped to our backs.

Two by two, with jackets back on, we went out into the rotunda, around the corner into the Army Experience Center, where I spoke with women from Grannies for Peace who were playing but not enjoying the bloody games, alongside a few youngsters. The secret was out. There was nearly one cop to every two "freeze" activists (20 or more cops to 50 activists).

At the prearranged time of 12:05 PM we threw off our jackets and stood absolutely still. The plan was to do a "freeze" for five minutes, but it was shorter since the cops came by and threatened to arrest us if we didn't move out. Even so, we made our point, and my only disappointment was that no high school newspaper reporters had shown up. It turned out they had been overlooked, not even invited—but there will be a next time. It's the vulnerable high school kids who need to know what this place really stands for.

As a former recruiter, I had to speak to the "educators." I dawdled out slowly, confronted a group at the entrance, and said, "I used to be in charge of all women's recruiting for the Third Naval District, but resigned because of the Vietnam War. Leaving a Navy career was my wake-up, and since then I've been protesting for peace. That's why I'm here."

One young man replied, "You have that right," either a canned reply, or trying to convince himself that he had the "right" to lure teenagers and sub-teens into the killing profession. Most of the recruiters turned away, but I believe one of the women might have been sympathetic to us, because I detected a painful smile. Hopefully she'll be a new recruit for IVAW, as other former recruiters have been.

Someone else in our group came up to talk to her, and I went hastily out into the rotunda since I saw Bill being forced outside the building through the Red Door (for the third time!) by Mall police—for taking photos. They were hurrying him along, so I stayed to speak with a policewoman. She was as young as most of the recruiters. I asked, "Why can't we demonstrate inside?" She said we had to leave because it was "private" property.

I said, "Then, the Red Door is appropriate. Kicking out peaceful demonstrators reminds me of growing up in one of the Red States in the Deep South, and the Soviet Russia and Red China. It's funny, I thought our taxes paid for recruiting stations, didn't you?

continued on next page

Agent Orange Campaign--Into High Gear

Paul Cox

Most of us have already heard that the US Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal to reinstate the three class-action lawsuits by the Vietnamese Association of Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin (VAVA) and two US-veteran groups against the US chemical companies for poisoning Vietnam with dioxin during the war. The attorneys for VAVA are filing for a rehearing by the Supreme Court in the hope that the new atmosphere around the new Administration may inspire them to reconsider.

If the Supreme Court fails to accept the new appeal, the court route to justice for the Vietnamese and US veterans is dead, deader than dead, never to be reanimated. Then it will be on to political efforts that will require not just the efforts of attorneys and a core of supporters, but focused actions across the country. Those of us who remember the original suit against the chemical companies in the early 80s recall that the court battle paved the way for Congress to provide compensation for US veterans exposed to AO. We are in an analogous situation now. We can now push both at the chemical companies to step up to their responsibilities and at Congress to take action.

First we must arouse public condemnation of the chemical companies in the form of a Corporate Campaign against Dow and Monsanto, the two largest of the chemical criminals who made AO and the other herbicides. Second, Vietnamese Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign (VAORRC) has started a legislative campaign to get Congress to provide funding and programs for the Vietnamese, US vets and Vietnamese Americans. While the main elements of the legislation will be to provide care, compensation and environmental clean-up to the Vietnamese; US veteran and Vietnamese-American care and compensation are also important.

The timing for the legislative campaign is good. The US geo-political imperative dictates that the US needs Vietnam to counteract the growing SE Asian influence of China. AO poisoning is a big issue for the Vietnamese. The Bushites recognized this issue was important, but did very little about it. The current Administration and Democratic Party-dominated Congress also recognize the importance of resolving the AO issue, and IF they receive enough domestic pressure, will actually move on it.

VAORRC has several VVAW members on its board and is working with various Congress members and Senators to draft this legislation. While the Vietnamese have been clear about the programs and aid they need to permanently improve and mitigate the dioxin problems in Vietnam, we do not yet have clarity on the additional aid US veterans need. We are also reaching out to Vietnamese-American communities to determine the effect dioxin has had on them and how best to address their needs.

We have questions for Vietnam War veterans: What changes or additions are needed to the current programs of care and compensation provided by the VA to Vietnam veterans affected by AO/dioxin poisoning? What additional research or other programs are needed for Vietnam veterans? Some veterans' groups want additional research and compensation for ill and disabled children and grandchildren of veterans who

were exposed to AO. We need your feedback as soon as possible. caulpox@gmail.com.

Time to shift into high gear.

Paul Cox served as a Marine in Vietnam from 1969 to 1970 and is a member of VVAW. He is on the National Board of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign.

Behind the Red Door

continued from the previous page

So how could they be private property? Seems to me they should rightly belong to whoever foots the bill. Which means they should be the taxpayers' property. OUR property."

She had no answer, but it still seems to me like a good question.

Today, February 18, 2009, Jack Kline, one of our DVVFA activists, a former Marine who wanted to be at the demo but had to be at work, sent around the current casualty report.

• US troops dead in the war in Iraq: 4,254
• US troops dead in the war in Afghanistan: 652
• Total: 4,906

• Pennsylvania troops dead in the war in Iraq: 191
• Pennsylvania troops dead in the war in Afghanistan: 24
• Total: 215

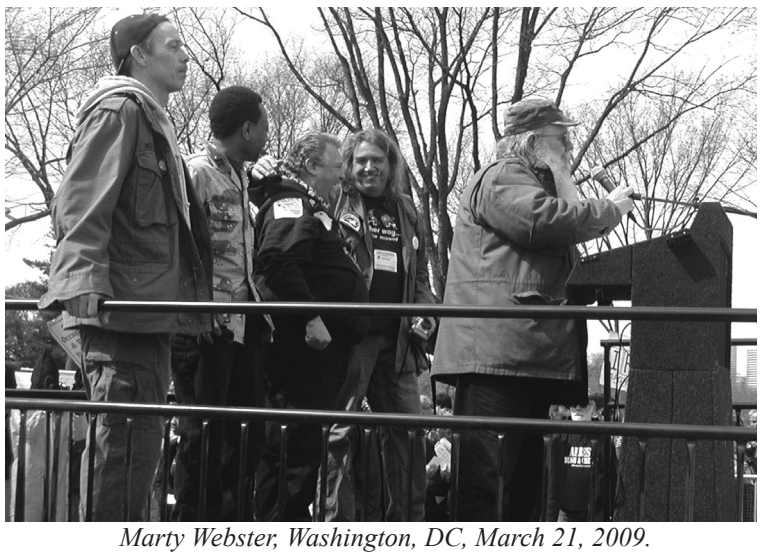
Nor can we ignore the latest count, from January 3 this year, of self-inflicted troop suicides in Iraq and Afghanistan. Suicide attempts have left 176 dead, 11 undetermined after investigation, and 16 pending investigation. The DOD doesn't count how many veterans kill themselves after returning home, but we from DVVFA, who have displayed the Sea of Tombstones at the Liberty Bell on commemorative holidays since 2005, know that this number is even higher. We see their faces, we know their stories—and often the ones who loved them.

It means that thus far 215 Pennsylvanians have been KIA in both wars, plus tens of thousands of wounded and an indeterminate number of suicides. That was why peace veteran Bill Perry asked the most important question in an email to me after the demonstration:

"And the Army Experience wants MORE?"

Sandy Fulton is proud to be a member of VVAW and Delaware Valley Veterans for America.

The new IVAW chapter in Salt Lake City brought Winter Soldier testimony to Utah March 19 and 21. IVAW members spoke at the city library on a panel titled: War is Not the Answer in Iraq or Afghanistan. Shown in the picture on the right is Andy Figorski speaking as Gary Barkley and Chris Conway listen.



Marty Webster, Washington, DC, March 21, 2009.

VVAW's West Coast Tour

continued from page 1

Even after no Iraqi WMDs, 9/11 connections or al Qaeda relationships were found, not enough effort was put into Afghanistan where the Taliban regained strength, war lords flourished, the new government stumbled, purer heroin flowed from the country and the war of error about terror spread to Pakistan. Meanwhile, VVAW helped people upgrade their discharges, counseled about VA hassles, held standdowns, worked with Iraq and Afghanistan vets and IVAW and fielded information requests from researchers, documentary makers and students.

Is a smaller segment of today's population bearing a heavier burden while a larger majority bears less? If the nation is over extended, is it because of unnecessary "adventures," inadequate utilization, inept preparation or execution?

Things like "culture wars," ecology / global warming, fundamentalist religiosity, excessively partisan domestic politics, increased international economic and political interaction and competition can require new, or adapted, strategies. That's what VVAW's tour offered and looked for.

Horace Coleman was an Air Force air traffic controller / intercept director in Vietnam (1967-68). He also served in Tactical Air Command, Pacific Air Command and North American Air Defense. He speaks at grade schools, high schools and churches and lives in Long Beach, CA.

Marty Webster

The West Coast Tour

Chukia Lawton and Barry Romo

Iraq Trip Report Back

continued from page 1

in most cities that the mental space to start thinking through the issues of workers rights is extremely difficult. As he was sharing this, I was thinking about the December bombing in Kirkuk that Samir had luckily survived. From the airport we were quickly driven through afternoon air past traffic circles and Kurdish Militiamen, stationed at every corner, to a western style hotel that was surrounded by concrete walls and had more Kurdish militiamen with AK-47s.

After dropping our bags and taking a moment to freshen up we were taken out to a fast-food western-style restaurant where we were bestowed with Iraqi hospitality. We were spoiled with food and it became embarrassingly clear there was no way to refuse the generosity that was not deserved. At the dinner I met Harman, a college student in the local university. The night passed quickly and when I woke in the morning I wrote in my journal trying to wrap my head around the evening conversation:

Harman at dinner last night.

At a strange dinner for western fast food tastes I spoke with Harman, a student from the university here. The suffering he told me of...

His eyes. They held tears but the tears never dropped.

He told me of Saddam and the gas.

And his love for Kurdistan.

And of the Americans...they do so many things wrong.

Maybe even set bombs.

His cousin recently died in an IED; but the Americans made it through with no scratches.

Something in our conversation makes me want to cry. The guilt comes back and I have no right to say anything. I want to cry and say I am sorry but there is nothing for me to say. Kirkuk is a mess and the United States is not helping.

It is the morning of day one. Birds hop and sing all over the pine trees outside my hotel patio door. The same dust smog sits over the city that I remember.

The morning birds hide and coo in the trees and I think of my crazy dreams. Dreams of strange anxiousness were overwhelming.

I woke many times tossing and turning; confused by the time change and no watch. The sun comes up at 6 AM and the air is gray and cool. Cool like a summer morning in the desert of the suburbs back home. I am in the desert again and gray brown white is omnipresent and I am stuck in western false luxury. The hotel is too much for me. I have taken so much from the Iraqis and yet I am taking more and they only share love and trust. Trust I do not deserve. I would love a sleeping bag and my truck hood. I would love to stay in a small house with kind hearts.

Before I continue, I need to share a little about how this return journey came about. Over the past year IVAW Chicago has been working on building up relationships with labor, specifically US Labor Against the War (USLAW). This led Terry Davis from Chicago USLAW to invite me personally to speak at the December 2008 USLAW Steering Committee meeting. At this talk I heard a lot about the plans for an upcoming International Labor Conference in Iraq, which USLAW had already been working on for over a year.

I was also afforded the opportunity to meet Amjad Ali from the Iraq Freedom Congress and a member of the planning committee of the conference. After hearing about the vision of the conference: to create a united front against the occupation and the prevention of trade union rights under the slogan of "a better world can be made by workers," I quickly started thinking about how valuable it would be for IVAW to attend the conference in order to take concrete steps towards our second point of unity: reparations for the human and structural damages Iraq has suffered and stopping the corporate pillaging of Iraq so that their people can control their own lives and future.

I asked Michael Eisencher, the national coordinator for USLAW, if he thought it would be appropriate for IVAW to request an invitation to the conference. He responded very quickly by informing me he would ask the Iraqis and get back to me. Less then a week later I received an official invitation for IVAW to send one delegate to the conference and within just a few weeks of the original request, it was confirmed that IVAW would be able to send two members to attend the first ever International Labor Conference in Iraq. TJ Buonomo a former Army Intelligence Officer and myself were to join Mike Zweig of United University Professions and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 2190, Bill Shortell President of the Central Connecticut Labor Council and International Association of Machinists (IAM), Jim Norris President of the United Steel Workers (USW) Local 675 and representative of the national USW's oil workers in the US, and Michael Eisencher.

Humbling.

The conference was set up to bring together the major labor constituencies from across Iraq to form a confederation based on worker rights. At the end of our second day, the eve of the conference, workers from fifteen of Iraq's eighteen provinces began to arrive. There were representatives from Iraq's oil and gas industry, its port union, the electrical generation and distribution industry, construction, public sector, transportation, communications, education, rail roads, service and health care industries, machinists and metal working sector, the petro-chemical industry, civil engineers, writers and journalists, food oil workers, tailors and students.

The historical nature of the conference was clear. This opportunity for the international community and the workers across Iraq to show solidarity was long overdue. After the United States invaded Iraq and set up the provisional government, a new constitution was drafted that included worker rights. However, at the same time, Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, retained Saddam Hussein's labor laws.

In their 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (from February 25, 2009), the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor notes:

"The constitution provides the right to form and join unions and professional associations, subject to regulating law. Labor Law 150 of 1987, enacted by the Saddam government, ...declared virtually all public sector workers to be government 'executives,' and therefore legally ineligible to form or to join unions, a move that, in effect, eliminated unions and the right of association from the public sector. In the private sector, the extant 1987 Trade Union Organization Law ...was also intended, in practice, to remove the right of association from a majority of private sector workers, because most private sector businesses employ fewer than 50 workers. Decree 8750 of 2005, which can-

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Abid Jassim Kathem (left) and unidentified man.
Both were participants in the famous oil workers strike of 1968 in Baghdad

Iraq Trip Report Back

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celled unions' leadership boards, froze their assets, and formed an inter-ministerial committee to administer unions' assets and assess their capacity to resume activity, also inhibited union activity. The laws and decree do not prohibit anti-union discrimination by employers or others. In addition to this oppressive legal and regulatory framework, violence and insecurity, high unemployment, and maladapted labor organizational structures inhibited the exercise of labor rights."

Throughout the conference, in moments here and there, over sips of tea, in the hallway between talks, over a meal of lamb and rice, or in the marble floored lobby I had the opportunity to speak with the different labor leaders. Their stories were hopeful and humble. They were filled with courageous acts of resistance against the many odds stacked against them. Their government does not legally recognize unions and organizing in the public sector (seventy percent of the economy) is illegal. Union assets are frozen and confiscated. The US military has raided union leaders' homes and occupied factories and plants. The local militias target union leaders and female workers. Despite these odds, the unions are organizing, growing and winning.

Leading by example is the Iraq Federation of Oil Unions (IFOU) lead by its president Hassan Juma'a Awad, which exploded in size over the past four years to over 25,000 members. It is the strongest and most powerful union in Iraq and is also extremely militant in regards to worker rights. For example, the union has protested, gone on strike, and used direct non-violent tactics to force the British occupation forces to stand down and furthermore drove the US contractor KBR from the oil fields near Basra.

The National Electrical Association also has a history of great struggle. One representative from the Babel region shared a story that I still find hard to believe. In the most casual manner he said the US military had taken control of his power plant and was using it as part of a camp. The US military would no longer let the workers bring equipment into the now "secure area" to maintain the power plant. The tools and supplies were considered to be a security risk. The plant gave power to the surrounding area and the workers did not want their plant to fall into disarray like so many others. So they started a demonstration and a strike. The national government called the union leaders and told them to stop and said they were making it worse on themselves and aggravating the US military. Despite this, the workers continued to strike and forced the US military to back down and leave the power plant alltogether. These are the stories from Iraq that need to be heard.

One of the women from the Women's Union and the Oil Federation shared a story about national women's day. She said even though women are targeted, her women's group stood in public on International Women's Day in Basra, one of the most dangerous cities for women. It was a small demonstration of only about twenty women but they stood strong despite the repercussions that they were all too familiar with.

Another woman had traveled up from Samara, a city that was ravaged by the US forces. She spoke of the ongoing work with widowed women. She was trying to get a can factory built in the city so the women who now had no form of income could have work and feed their children. She also told me about the overwhelming number of orphans and the need to build orphanages.

Humbling.

The conference was a major success. Delegations came not only from across Iraq and the United States but also from the United Kingdom, Japan, South Africa, Australia, and Iran. At the closing of the two day conference, three of Iraq's major labor organizations, the Iraq Federation of Oil Unions, the Nationwide Electricity Association, and the General Federation of Workers Councils and Unions, came together with their international allies and signed an agreement to create a new labor confederation.

In addition to the formation of a new confederation dedicated to struggling for the Iraqi workers there were also eight resolutions passed. They are:

1. Resolution to form an international front against wars, economic blockade and the prevention of union rights;
2. Resolution on the global economic crisis and the workers stance;
3. Resolution on the Iraqi government's interference into workers affairs;
4. Resolution to promote and support an independent, non-sectarian and non-ethnic government in Iraq;
5. Resolution on immediate enactment of a Labour Code to give all workers the right to organize and bargain in unions of their choice;
6. Resolution against the draft oil and gas law;
7. Resolution against privatization;
8. Resolution to support the workers in the Japanese company (Panasonic).

(The full text can be found on the USLAW web page link: uslaboragainstwar.org/article.php?id=18626)

During the second day of the conference there were workshops conducted on the risks of privatization, the draft oil and gas law, labor laws and trade union freedoms, women's and trade union action, global labor solidarity, war and its psychological repercussions, and labor media. The most impressive panel was the one on women's rights lead by Hirman Kazim. She spoke of the targeting of women and the abuses they face at home and at the work place. There was hope that at the next meeting of the confederation there could be a resolution passed in favor of women's rights.

TJ and myself were asked to present during the workshop titled "War and Its Psychological Repercussions." I still get anxious thinking about going up onto the stage in front of so many individuals that

continued on next page

Oil Union leader Saba Passam (center) with Nadia and Ruth from the UK delegation.

Iraq Trip Report Back

continued from previous page

I had either directly or indirectly oppressed and violated.

I vividly remember walking up on stage. My heart was racing; I could feel the clamminess of my skin and the sweat on my forehead. I started slowly for the translator:

"I was here in your country pointing my weapon at your children, at your communities and for that I am sorry. But forgiveness is something I cannot ask for and responsibility is something I have to take. This is why I am here today representing Iraq Veterans Against the War to take responsibility for what has been done to your country and stand in solidarity with the people of Iraq."

I continued by sharing the history of IVAW, the story of GI resistance, and how I got involved with the movement. I concluded my talk by reading a poem about the little Iraqi boy who had moved me from speaking out against the war to taking action. He was a little boy who was receiving help to get a prosthetic arm and eyes in the states from an organization called Global Medical Relief Fund. I had the opportunity to befriend the young boy.

When he returned in 2007 to the volatile Baghdad, I took to the streets. I read:

"Ahmed Jabar Shareef is my friend and my guardian angel.

The children lining the roads of Iraq begging for food fill me with guilt, cynicism and anger.

Yet Ahmed who has been raped by this war, raped of his youth, raped of his body, raped of his sight, raped of his home, raped of his freedom, has no cynicism in his thoughts.

He gives love and trust without fear.

He grabs my hand and yells, 'Run. Run please? Please, run.'

He is a nine-year-old boy who wants to run.

He is a nine-year-old boy who can't run without someone to lead him. To stop him before the curb, before the tree, before the car that he cannot see.

He is a nine-year-old boy who wants to stomp his feet and twist to pop music.

He is a nine-year-old boy that teaches himself to play piano.

He is a nine-year-old boy that is a bird who knows no barbed wire.

He is a nine-year-old boy that is my guardian angel constantly reminding me that life is for love and trust, not cynicism and anger.

Ahmed Jabar Shareef is my friend."

TJ spoke directly after me and denounced the manipulation of intelligence, bribing of Iraqi journalists, the torture of Iraqi prisoners, the suppression of worker rights, and attempts by the US government and multinational corporations to control Iraqi oil.

After TJ finished speaking an Iraqi man stood up and took the microphone and began speaking eagerly. He then began walking up toward the stage and I thought to myself that whatever this was I deserved it. As the translation came through I heard, "I just want to come on stage and give these men a... hug."

I began to cry as I was embraced. As the audience stood and celebrated, once again I was reminded life is for love and trust not cynicism and anger. I was later told the man was known to be a staunch nationalist.

Humbling

On the final day, the Iraqi representatives headed back to their respective provinces and the international delegations prepared to leave. Nadia, one of the leaders of the Women's Union, shared this response to our talks with me before we parted ways:

"Thanks for being here
For sharing your feelings
Your precious feelings

They put us against each other
They made us open
Lies against each other
Not me
Not you
Who would

Go back to these places again
In different eyes
In different you
You who are you
Not who had made

Innocent, clean, calm, peaceful
Go back to end your feeling
Process
Come back again
Come back to Iraq, group of you,
make, is a song against war..."

Please consider making a generous donation to the conference through USLAW. The Conference gave the Iraqi Unions 60,000 dollars in loans. Visit: www.uslaboragainstwar.org

Aaron Hughes joined Iraq Veterans Against the War in 2006 and has served as Member, a Chapter President, a Regional Coordinator, Board Member, and Organizer. He helped found the Winter Soldier Project, the Warrior Writers Project, and the Chicago Chapter.

The Enemy

There are few beggars in Vietnam nowadays.

It is a fertile country where most people grow vegetables on their small plots of land.

He was one of the few I saw my whole trip, standing alone near the tourist stop, looking forlorn on crutches; his missing leg long gone.

Was this broken old man a fierce soldier 40 years ago?

How strange to see your adversary so distant from the seminal event of his life and mine.

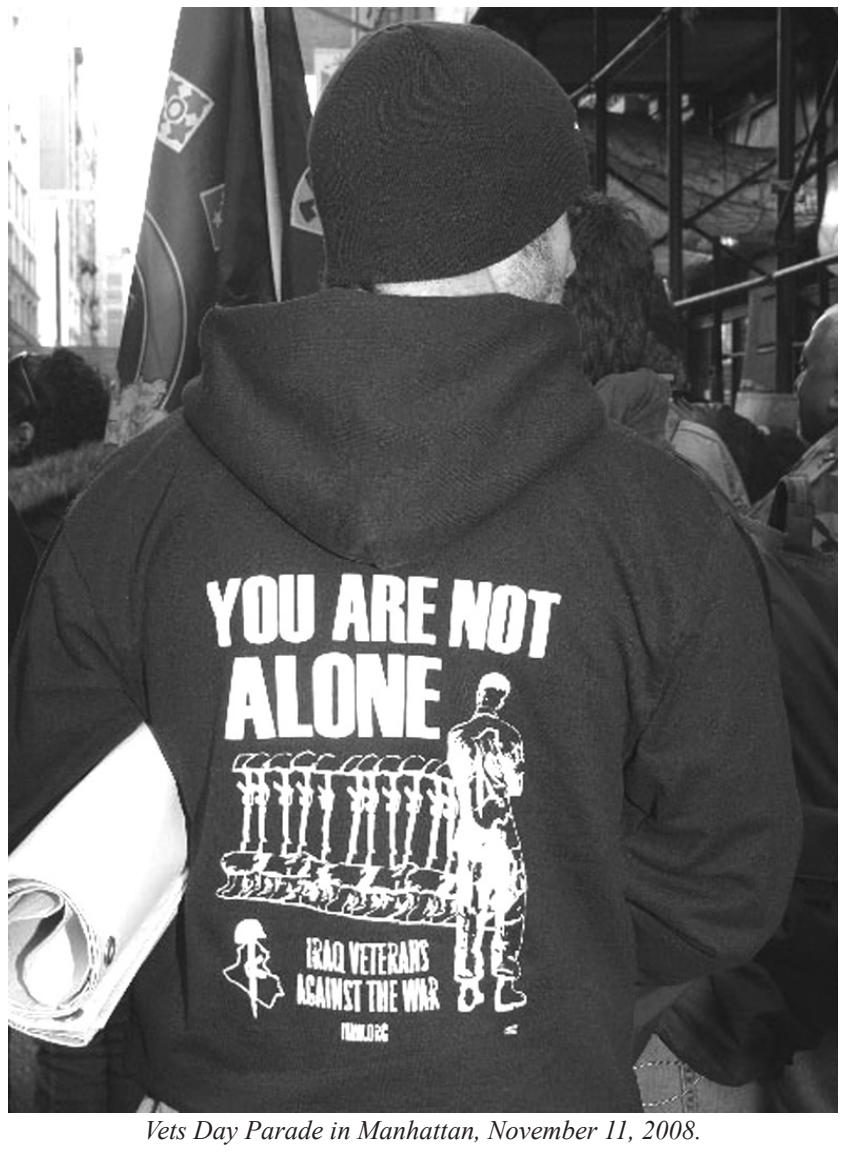
Dashing out of the van carrying our tour group, I leave a much too small donation to this once proud warrior.

Why didn't I at least look deeply into his eyes?

His image haunts me as I struggle still with what it all meant.

How I wish to relive that moment, to connect in some way with a man who once was the enemy.

— Matt Wathen, A-7 pilot, USS Enterprise, 1969



Vets Day Parade in Manhattan, November 11, 2008.

VVAW West Coast Tour and Building Coalitions

Steve Crandall

The CA Central Coast Chapter was formed in May of 2007. I was such a novice at forming any type of veteran's group and I needed help. Marty Webster was one of the first to give me direction and support. Marty and I discussed a name for the Chapter. My first thought was to call it the Ventura County Chapter and Marty asked if I was to reach out for members what would be the furthest distance I could expect members to join and participate in our events. I hate driving into LA so my thoughts took me north to San Luis Obispo. His next question was what would you call the area from Camarillo to San Luis Obispo and my response was the CA Central Coast. Marty got us a banner and we were on our way.

Since the beginning I have made several VVAW friends via email and phone conversations but I never had the opportunity to personally meet any of them. So when I heard we might be hosting a VVAW West Coast Tour I felt like a kid waiting for Santa Claus to show up. Okay, several Santa Claus' all with grey beards but without the red and white suits. Those Santa's included George Johnson, Marty Webster, Barry Romo, Jan Ruhman and Willie Hager. They were later joined by Mickey Krakowski from Colorado.

We invited leading members of like minded veteran's groups to participate. We had members of the Evan Ashcraft Memorial Foundation, Veterans For Peace, Brokenrope Foundation and Veterans United for Truth. These members were also associate members of other groups such as Gold Star Mothers, VFW and DAV. We were looking for a good cross section of the liberal thinkers and I believe we achieved it.

We had a light dinner and chatted before Marty Webster opened the meeting by sharing aspects of a prior event at the University of Cincinnati where he showed the DVD, *Sir! No Sir!* Marty said a recruiter was identified as one of the attendees at the showing. The recruiter was allowed to speak and talked about how great the military is but by the end of the evening was despondent and was brought to tears after listening to others describe how smells, sounds and realities of war impacted their lives. The reason Marty told this story was to show how some of the most avid pro-military people can come to an understanding as to how lives can be ruined due to the impact of war. A seed of conscience was planted and the audience bonded together.

Marty went on to talk about the VVAW slogan, "Honor the Warrior Not the War," which was coined in 1985. Marty stated that the slogan represents all warriors including the recruiter. Which brings us to one of the reasons of this gathering, how can we create a larger tent and include those that sometimes disagree with our view points about the war in Iraq. Another purpose of this gathering was to discover what is working and what is not working in regards to the continuing effort to help veterans returning from war.

Barry Romo took the floor next. Barry talked about how helpful an organization can be to getting a story told. To give an example he told the story of Rosa Parks and that she was actually the third person to refuse her seat on a bus but what put her in the media spotlight was that she was a member of and supported by several civil rights organizations. Barry talked about VVAW's history and how as an organization it fought to get PTSD recognized as a casualty of war. He also talked about the need to find ways to expand our efforts on topics like Agent Orange, Depleted Uranium, sexual assaults on women in the military and funding the VA.

Jan A. Ruhman

After Barry finished we went around the room and everyone shared a story. Most of the stories led to more questions and discussions like the war in Afghanistan and whether or not it could be won. How can we work most effectively with other veteran's groups?

Consider building coalitions with other organizations; consider forming writer's groups; sharing ideas and post events on other organizations web sites; educating our youth about peace and the military so they can make informed decisions. We discussed creating talking circles and raising public awareness to the plight of veterans. Everyone in the country is affected by someone in the military and yet we do not fully fund veteran's health care.

We all agreed that we need a stronger voice for veteran's needs and the way to achieve that is to build a veteran's coalition. We would start by reaching out on a local level to groups that might not share our own views about the war in Iraq or educating our youth about war. If we could all leave our "political hats" at the door maybe we could work together for the common good of veterans. The CA Central Coast Chapter has already started to do so by contacting the local VFW to find out if they would be willing to join us on a common cause for veterans. To our surprise they agreed to do so. In discussions with Veterans United for Truth, VFP and Brokenrope Foundation we decided to create a tri-county veteran's coalition. The thought is that members of each group will reach out to other groups. The Evan Ashcraft Foundation is contacting MFSO. The CA Central Coast Chapter will also reach out to the local AL Post and the Brokenrope Foundation will be talking to the local DAV.

The CA Central Coast Chapter will not give up our efforts to educate the public and children about the devastating effects of war. But we agreed we could table those efforts while we work with other groups on common veteran's issues. All other groups on both sides would be expected to do the same. We just need to stay focused that this is all about the veterans and improving the lives of those serving in the military.

Barry Romo and Marty Webster

Steve Crandall is the president of the California Central Coast Chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Why Can't I Remember?

Forty years and so little reflection
A phony veteran, a harmless bomber, an impersonal killer
How do I reconcile my Vietnam experience?
I read in awe and disbelief of the grunts' agonizing actions on the ground
Was this the same war I fought in?
I never set foot in Vietnam
I never had fear of rocket attacks or snipers at night
I never even saw the enemy on the ground-or did I?

The story that I have told myself and believed until recently was this:
I blew up tons of karst on the tree-shrouded Ho Chi Minh trail
I didn't see any secondaries, movers or troops
How could I have killed anybody?
But I flew so many missions dropping six 1000# bombs or twelve 500# bombs
Expending that much ordnance was bound to kill people
Just because I didn't see any direct hits, doesn't mean I did no damage
Now I believe I did cause horror, fear and death to those working "the trail"

I think back on the many times I worked in I Corps after a strike in Laos
The bombs had been released, so all I had was 20 mike mike in the guns
I truly can't remember anything I strafed
I do recall jinxing on the pullout to avoid any ricochets from my fire
And what about those last couple of missions to use up those Mark 84's-2000# bombs
The ship didn't want to bring unexpended ordnance back stateside
So they sent us out with four of those huge bombs hanging from the pylons
I can still feel the cat shot on those strikes-eyes "uncaging"and a big sink at the end of the stroke
I'm pretty sure I dropped those huge bombs in country
I have no recollection of where we released them
But the violent concussion I felt on pull out at 4000 feet is still imprinted on my memory

So I remember some things very well, but I've selectively forgotten much
Everything to do with weapons on target seems hidden somewhere deep inside
Is this my way of avoiding PTSD?
If I could access these lost memories, what affect would it have on my life now?
Why aren't there other pilots with thoughts and questions similar to mine?
Maybe there have been-after all I'm just dealing with this 40 years after the fact
It is so much easier to dismiss damage we've done in such a detached way
We were spared the haunting images of mutilated bodies, destroyed villages, and other atrocities
Fighting an impersonal war brings up a far different set of issues to deal with-
Much more subtle, but no less profound.

— Matt Wathen, A-7 pilot, USS Enterprise, 1969

Matt Wathen served as a Naval Aviator on active duty from 1967 to 1972. He retired as a Commander after 20 years of active and reserve service. He has worked as a registered nurse, and retired after 17 years as an airline pilot. He's been involved in VVAW, VFP and the Vietnam Veterans Writing Group for 2 years.

Featuring the authors of:

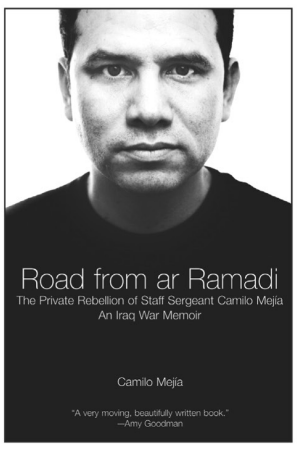
Winter Soldiers

An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War • Richard Stacewitz

"Stacewicz has captured the simple, rough-hewn elegance of the voices of Vietnam veterans. As in other wars, the ordinary soldier always has the most extraordinary words for history."

—Stanley Kutler, editor, *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*

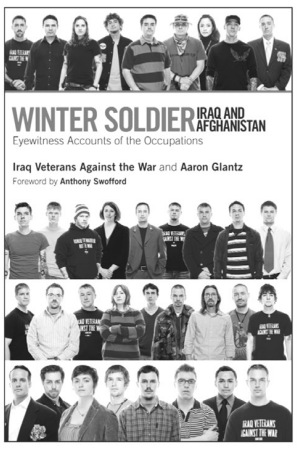
This powerful collection brings to life the experiences of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, whose actions have inspired a new generation of activists and antiwar veterans. $18



Road from ar Ramadi

The Private Rebellion of Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejía • An Iraq War Memoir • Camilo Mejía

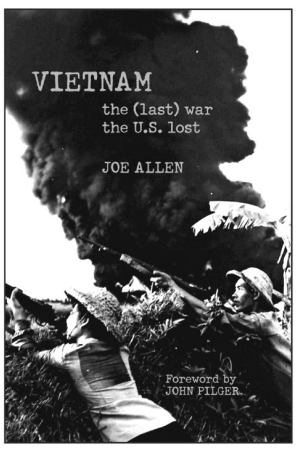
In 2004, Mejía became the first U.S. soldier who, after fighting in Iraq, publicly refused to return to the war. He was sentenced to military prison and declared a Prisoner of Conscience by Amnesty International. Mejía's insipring story offers critical insight into the impact of U.S. forces in Iraq, prisoner abuse, and the prospects for resistance to U.S. militarism. $16



Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan

Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations
Iraq Veterans Against the War and Aaron Glantz

In Spring 2008 Iraq Veterans Against the War gathered veterans in Washington, DC to tell the truth about the U.S. occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. This book collects the powerful words, images, and documents of the historic event, including testimony on the U.S. military's changing "rules of engagement," racism stoked by the military command, gender and sexuality within the military's ranks, and the crisis in veteran's health care. $16



Vietnam

The (Last) War the U.S. Lost • Joe Allen

"Joe Allen's book is so needed, and so welcome. Indeed, the following pages amount to a masterpiece in which the author, unrelenting in his research, has reclaimed memory from the organized forgetting that has so bedeviled the very word 'Vietnam.'"

—John Pilger, from the foreword

Vietnam charts the growth of the powerful GI rebellion, Vietnamese resistance, and antiwar movment that brought the U.S. military to defeat. $14

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VVAW's Future of the Anti-War Movement Under an Obama Administration, West Coast Tour

Willie Hager

Cracker Swamp, FL – After one of the more intense (in a good way) weeks of my surprisingly long life, I am finally getting back to normal...well, make that as near normal as I am capable of getting, under the circumstances. But that's a story for another day. This day is for the story of that week, and the dynamics that led up to it. Hopefully, the story of that week will be the story of the future of grass-roots organizing under the governance of an Obama administration. Particularly as it relates to the effects of seemingly un-ending war, and especially it's impact on Veterans, their families, and their quality of life issues.

This was the week that Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) went out on the road, all the way to to California. We had come to assess the current vital signs of the ant-war movement, and to discuss possible planning for activist political organizing in the political environment of an Obama administration, and to report back our findings to the National Coordinators of VVAW.

In reality, the week began shortly following the Winter Soldier Investigation:Iraq & Afghanistan in March of last year. Just as with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War's 40th Anniversary gathering in Chicago, the WSI:I&A event, which was co-sponsored by Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and VVAW, it generated a turn-out of old school VVAW types who had gone on to other lives after the fall of Nixon. The passion of current events, to include Iraq and Afghanistan, and a VA demonstrating badly needed reforms, has rekindled an energy in many of these folks that is seeking direction for release, and ensuing therapeutic action. After each of these powerfully motivating events, folks were asking, "What now...? Where does VVAW go from here...? Where do I go from here...? Where do us old school VVAW types fit in with all of this?"

Well, that conversation went on behind the scenes for awhile, amongst many of us who had come back together after thirty or so years. But it was also going on in all of the e-lists that we all belonged to. That repetition of questioning, in and amongst the various groups and organizations, cried out, it seemed to us old school VVAW types, for the formulation, implementation, and maintenance of a pragmatically realistic and doable operational plan. One that would provide a bonding in struggle at the grass-roots level of not only passionate and principled individuals, but also diversified resources and talents rallied around a set of shared political principles and pre-determined, mutually prioritized, focused, objectives.

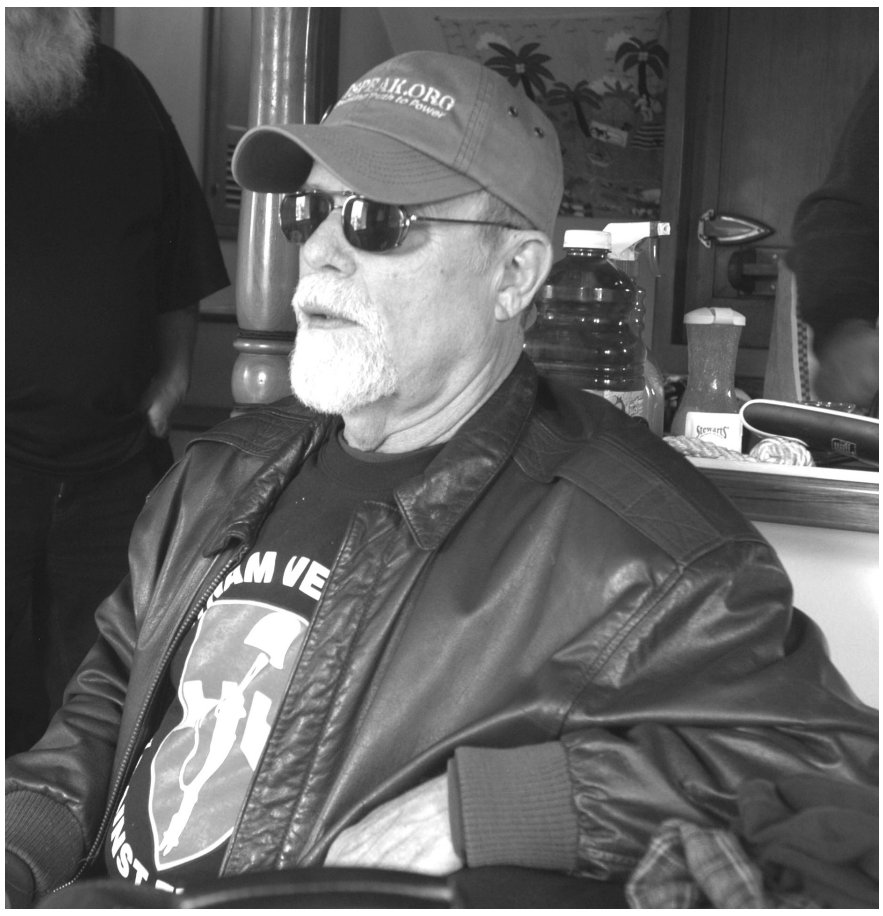
One that would give VVAW and other progressive organizations a re-newed focus, and a channel for newly re-generated energy, based on the formula that had worked so successfully for VVAW, back in The Day; unity + struggle = victory. This model is perceived as an operational plan which, like back in The Day, would provide a unified front of multiple organizations, all coalesced around issues that touch all aspects of the Veterans' and the families of Veterans and active duty GIs, and Veterans' support groups. The VVAW West Coast Tour was set up for the purpose of seeing if y'all agreed with this perspective, and if so, could we, together, organize an effective grass-roots anti-war campaign, in today's political world?

The Week, In Retrospect

Previous discussions of these pressing questions within VVAW had culminated in the "VVAW STILL STRONG AFTER ALL THESE YEARS": The Anti-war Movement Under An Obama Administration, West Coast Tour. A tour that began in the San Francisco Bay area on the 15th of February, and concluded in San Diego at Jan Ruhman's house on the 21st of February, 2009.

A tour that was in search of answers.

The VVAW traveling road show was headlined by Barry Romo and Marty Webster, VVAW National Coordinators; George Johnson, of Veterans For Peace (VFP), San Francisco Chapter 69, and a long standing member of VVAW, was on board, and served as Northern California tour coordinator and subsequent panel member; Jan Ruhman, the VVAW SoCal Organizing Contact and VP of San Diego Chapter of VFP, was the over-all West Coast Tour coordinator, and a subsequent panel member.



Willie Hager

The SoCal leg of the Tour, which began with a two day visit to the California Central Coast Chapter of VVAW, headquartered in Camarillo, CA, and coordinated by Steve and Carolyn Crandall. This leg of the Tour was also accompanied by Mickey Krakowski, an old school SoCal VVAW type, and a way back when, back to back brother, who got wind of the Tour all the way up in Grand Junction, Colorado, and wanted to come to listen and learn; and, finally, myself, Willie Hager, currently a VVAW Florida Organizing Contact, and once upon a time long ago, Regional Coordinator of VVAW, Calif/Nev, circa 1972-1974, who had come to listen and learn, as well.

Fact is, that's why we were all there. That's what the tour was all about. To find out what's working, and what's not. To get out amongst the grassroots and personally meet and talk with folks still committed to the fight (in Florida, we call this grippin' n' grinnin' vs e-in' and keyin'). To listen to what they have to say, and work to coordinate all our efforts in a broad unified front, based on a networking of talent and resources and organizations. We didn't come to tell folks what they should be doing, or how to do it...we came to listen, and to learn, and to contribute our historical perspective of the realities of todays political arena, as it applies to grass-roots organizing. I personally participated in all of the panels and discussions, beginning in Camarillo, and ending in San Diego, at Jan's house, for a house party and discussion group.

Many of us had poured our re-newed energy, and our eternal hope, and our grass-roots organizing talents into the Obama presidential campaign. Many others were afraid that we would get fooled again, as in "new boss same as the old boss...," and just hunkered down, and hoped for the best. Again, when the dust settled, and Obama had won the day; "What now...? Where does VVAW go from here." The other e-lists and groups, such as Veterans For Peace (VFP), Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), Military Families Speak Out, Orange County (MFSO-OC), and Courage To Resist, were all asking one another the same question; "What now...? Where do we go from here?" All of the panels and meetings on the VVAW tour were attended by folks from the above mentioned organizations. They were still asking these same

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Future of the Anti-War Movement

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questions when we met with them in their home.

Framing The Argument

Here's my personal take on all that I saw and heard, during that week...

They all, at every stop, agreed on this much; we should all be doing something. But what to do? How to do it? What with? By when? Who to call? All that was missing, it seemed, was a plan. Here were all these folks from all these different organizations who shared political principles, if not shared ideological bases or philosophies, eager to seize on a mission. Folks who realize that the struggle for change is long term, and that change is what we make it. All were in agreement, at every stop that, indeed; yes, we can.

It seemed as though we were already, by default, a coalition of the un-willing. Un-willing to support a militaristic foreign policy; un-willing to ignore the critical need for VA reform of current mental health diagnosis and support paradigms, as well as the service model of its disability claims division's processes; un-willing to accept the increasing rate of active duty and veterans' suicides; un-willing to ignore the sexual abuse of our women in uniform, often in combat theatres, and finally; un-willing to give up the fight for GI Rights.

It seemed like all that was needed, now, was... a plan.

Together Then, Together Again

Here were the doers...those who keep all of our organizations alive at the grassroots. Here they were, one-on-one, and as representatives of the various organizations already mentioned, in all of the communities that were on the VVAW West Coast Tour. And, here they all were, in peoples' living rooms and groups' meeting halls, all asking one another; how can we be most effective, in light of an Obama administration, a massive economic restructuring, and changing war on terror strategies, tactics, and theatres? I was honored to be part of the discussion.

As I understood them, these were the propositions that were recurrent throughout each of the gatherings that we attended:

1. That the concept of finding a way to present a unified front of organizations (affinity groups) that are rallied around, and focused on, a manageable number of issues or goals, which are realistically attainable, and that are mutually supportive focal issues and/or objectives, is a viable strategy that is worthy of further review as we move into the Obama era of grass-roots community organizing.

2. That it would be a good idea for the groups that were represented to set up follow-up meetings, where, together, they could identify mutual goals and objectives, and discuss a plan of action for their local groups and chapters to work in consort with.

3. That folks should outreach other local groups for the discussion, as well. The discussion to center on how to work together, each under our own particular organizational banners, sharing resources and talent on pre-determined, mutually agreed upon, operational plan.

4. That it was not only possible, but that it was in fact our best option, to adapt a pragmatic model of critical thinking in our planning, rather than waste precious time and resources on protracted debates on philosophy and ideology that drain energy and impede forward momentum on pressing issues.

Here are the mutually supportive issues that were expressed by those in attendance at each of the gatherings that I attended:

1. Full funding of all Veterans care.

2. VA reform of mental health PTSD diagnosis, treatment, and service delivery paradigms.

3. Sexual abuse of women in uniform, often in combat theatres.

4. Military recruiting practices, on campus and abroad.

5. GI Rights, i.e. Robin Long.

Seize The Moment

There were other suggestions worthy of consideration, of course. The ones that I have listed were simply the most frequently referred to as potential focus issues. My feeling is that, whichever ones would work best in your local area, and what resources are available amongst group members, should be decided on by an organizing committee that is composed of representatives of each organization in your area that is interested in this concept, and can speak for their local group or chapter. I believe that decisions of this nature should come from those who they most directly effect, not from those who think them up, but have no personal stake in either the the process, or the outcome. But, that's just me.

This Tour was a very powerful personal experience, as well as a powerful learning one. I was mightily impressed with the amount of energy and commitment that we found out there at the grass-roots. I want to close with the concluding sentence from an organizing pamphlet that Jan Ruhman and I created together, for California/Nevada VVAW, back in The Day, that reads, "Again, the main thing is not to be intimidated by myths about your community, but to find out for yourself what needs to be done and to go do it." The only word I would add at the end of that sentence, for all our considerations, is "together."

To all the great folks in California who worked to put the Tour together, and to all the other folks that we met with all along the El Camino Real; Thank you for your gracious hospitality...it warmed a Southern man's heart. And, most importantly, thanks to all of y'all; we now have a plan!

Nothin' left, now, but to do it...

Unity, Struggle, Victory!

Willie Hager is currently the Administrative Coordinator and Contributing Editor of www.VetSpeak.org. He is a proud member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

VVAW West Coast Tour

The VA's Number Game with PTSD Ratings

Ray Parrish

The VA determines ratings for PTSD by using their "Schedule for Rating Disabilities," found at 38 CFR, part 4. Unlike the criteria from the DSM used to confirm a diagnosis of PTSD, the rating schedule doesn't list the symptoms of PTSD, rather it looks at the impact that the symptoms have on the veteran's "occupational and social functioning." So, when appealing a percentage assigned in a VA rating decision, your treating therapist or doctor can use the language from the rating formula and say which paragraph most closely approximates the severity of the veteran's PTSD. Please note their use of adjectives indicating degree, such as, occasional or most. Also note their use of difficulty versus inability.

VA General Rating Formula for Mental Disorders:

100%

Total occupational and social impairment, due to such symptoms as: gross impairment in thought processes or communication; persistent delusions or hallucinations; grossly inappropriate behavior; persistent danger of hurting self or others; intermittent inability to perform activities of daily living (including maintenance of minimal personal hygiene); disorientation to time or place; memory loss for names of close relatives, own occupation, or own name.

70%

Occupational and social impairment, with deficiencies in most areas, such as work, school, family relations, judgment, thinking, or mood, due to such symptoms as: suicidal ideation; obsessional rituals which interfere with routine activities; speech intermittently illogical, obscure, or irrelevant; near-continuous panic or depression affecting the ability to function independently, appropriately and effectively; impaired impulse control (such as unprovoked irritability with periods of violence); spatial disorientation; neglect of personal appearance and hygiene; difficulty in adapting to stressful circumstances (including work or a work like setting); inability to establish and maintain effective relationships.

50%

Occupational and social impairment with reduced reliability and productivity due to such symptoms as: flattened affect; circumstantial, circumlocutory, or stereotyped speech; panic attacks more than once a week; difficulty in understanding complex commands; impairment of short- and long-term memory (e.g., retention of only highly learned material, forgetting to complete tasks); impaired judgment; impaired abstract thinking; disturbances of motivation and mood; difficulty in establishing and maintaining effective work and social relationships.

30%

Occupational and social impairment with occasional decrease in work efficiency and intermittent periods of inability to perform occupational tasks (although generally functioning satisfactorily, with routine behavior, self-care, and conversation normal), due to such symptoms as: depressed mood, anxiety, suspiciousness, panic attacks (weekly or less often), chronic sleep impairment, mild memory loss (such as forgetting names, directions, recent events)

10%

Occupational and social impairment due to mild or transient symptoms which decrease work efficiency and ability to perform occupational tasks only during periods of significant stress, or; symptoms controlled by continuous medication.

0%

A mental condition has been formally diagnosed, but symptoms are not severe enough either to interfere with occupational and social functioning or to require continuous medication.

Ray Parrish (Sgt., USAF, 72-75) is VVAW's military counselor. If you need help, call him at 773-561-8829 or email him at camiblue@vvaw.org.

Helping Vets In Prison

Ray Parrish

The Coalition for Prisoner Rights newsletter did an article on my work and the letters from vets in prison started flowing in. I'm trying to find help for these vets in their own areas for discharge upgrade and VA claims and setting up vet rap groups. Contact me if you're aware of such resources or are interested yourself. I've handwritten replies to them all on the back of the following information:

VA Benefits and Incarcerated Veterans

Incarcerated vets can receive and apply for VA benefits and appeal any denial. Once the vet submits evidence to support a claim, the VA must arrange for any exams needed to make a rating decision. The VA will reduce the payment of service connected disability compensation on the 61st day of incarceration after guilt is pronounced for a felony. Those receiving 10% ($117/mo in 2008) will have it cut in half. Veterans getting 20% ($230/mo) or more will have payments reduced to 10%. This pay reduction does not reduce the disability rating. Veterans getting non-service connected Pension will get none of it after the 61st day of incarceration for either a felony or misdemeanor. The balance of benefits not paid to the veteran while incarcerated can be apportioned to family members upon request by either the veteran or family. Veterans will get benefits restored after release.

Less than honorable discharges are routinely used by the VA to deny benefits. Most are the result of severe, untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or anxiety, depression, bi-polar, personality disorders etc. The mental disorders caused many veterans to commit the misconduct that lead to the bad discharge. Properly worded psychological evaluations explaining this cause/effect can be used to get the VA to make a "character of service" determination that would allow them to ignore an OTH or UD or a BCD (not given at a General Court Martial) by admitting that there was no dishonorable service after the vet's ability to serve honorably was taken away by the service connected problem. This also will allow the VA to service connect the disability and provide treatment and disability benefits. Direct service connection can be shown if medical records show symptoms were present during service or within a year of discharge and a medical opinion says that the current disability is a continuation of those symptoms. PTSD can be service connected years after service if there is evidence of military trauma and there's a PTSD diagnosis. The same evaluations can be submitted to the military as evidence that a discharge should be upgraded to honorable or medical. With the evaluations, the veteran should submit a narrative explaining his/her actions and asserting that the misconduct was caused by inappropriate and unfair treatment.

Incarcerated veterans should demand and document treatment. Vets should also form their own self-help groups where they can share good ideas about dealing with symptoms and help each other recover. Records should be kept of these sessions.

Standard Form 180, "Request Pertaining to Military Records," can be used to get copies of personnel records, including OTH/UD case separation files, court martial transcripts, investigative reports, clinical treatment records, rehab records, sick-call medical records, ships' logs and unit histories. Give dates and places when appropriate. Make a copy before mailing. Follow-up requests may be needed.

Ray Parrish (Sgt., USAF, 72-75) is VVAW's military counselor. If you need help, call him at 773-561-8829 or email him at camiblue@vvaw.org.

An Open Letter to the Acupuncture and Veteran Communities

Gregory Ross

Recently, the Air Force Surgeon General web site and *Acupuncture Today*, among other newspapers and blogs, had articles about the Department of Defense decision to teach "battlefield acupuncture" to 44 active-duty physicians. The treatment involves minute, gold-alloy needles retained in the ear. These allow the soldier to wear a helmet so that they can return to combat. My first reactions were shock and anger. As a Vietnam Navy veteran and an acupuncturist, two disparate parts of my life came crashing together. How dare they use this healing practice to foster war! Then an obvious truth presented itself: every military since antiquity included medical personnel. These are both my misgivings and my hopes for the inclusion of acupuncture into possibly the most conservative of US institutions: the military.

I'm not surprised that the Department of Defense's primary concern is to relieve physical pain and/or emotional trauma enough to return soldiers to fighting capacity as soon as possible. A lot of money and time was invested in training people to become soldiers. The articles further stated that the secondary interest is to save money treating those too damaged to return to war. Finally, the third concern is compassion for personnel. The veterans reading this letter will understand the necessity of the dehumanizing aspect of military language and training. The ability to kill upon command is a basic skill set. Many lives depend upon this skill, and many more lives have been lost to it.

Acupuncture is a healing practice based upon returning body/mind/spirit to balance, which is a very different skill set. It is my belief that killing does not come naturally to the majority of people. It takes conditioning, desensitizing and an unbalancing of basic human nature. What does it take to change civilians into combat-ready military personnel? Why is the suicide rate among combat personnel and veterans so much higher than among civilians?

The answer to both questions is the same: dehumanizing conditioning. However, what could be more humanizing than confronting your own death? And what better time to try to bring the body/mind/spirit back into balance?

Treatment can be an opportunity for healing in all senses of the word. A time to practice compassion. I believe it can be the arena in which civilian acupuncturists might have much to offer, if they can learn to understand the motivations of military personnel. Treating those soldiers not so severely wounded or traumatized as to preclude returning to battle will be handled by military medical personnel. I don't mean to say they do this without compassion, but the soldier is still returned to harm's way. Treating those too severely harmed to return to combat can fall to civilian practitioners who, in fact, have already been treating veterans privately for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and physical complaints.

However, both military and civilian practitioners could also be lacking in compassion. On the one hand, you have those whose duty it is to return personnel to war, and on the other, you may have subtle (and even not-so-subtle) arrogant ignorance of privilege. More than one fellow acupuncture student, when they found out I was a Vietnam veteran remarked, "How could you do such a horrible thing?" This happened often enough that I no longer bothered to explain the economics of the draft and why their privileged family avoided war. I stopped pointing out that their question implied that I had a choice beyond going to war, going to jail or leaving the country forever. The current volunteer Army is not much different.

It is my opinion that acupuncture for military personnel is an opportunity to unite two fringe communities: those we designate as our protectors (but who often are required to kill) and the practitioners of an ancient healing system based on returning to balance. It is my hope that this melding will ultimately be beneficial and balancing to both groups.

Gregory Ross is a Navy veteran, who served off the coast of Vietnam, 1968-69. He's a graduate of the VA drug, alcohol and PTSD program [1980]. He's a Licensed Acupuncturist [detoxification specialty, 1989]. He has published in "Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace." Avoids haircuts, shaving.

Free Alternative Veterans Health Clinic

Johanna (Hans) Buwalda and Mary Kay Ryan

On March 8, in the presence of veterans, body workers, acupuncturists, energy workers, and all other supporters of this new clinic, founders Mary Kay Ryan and Barb Schmidt cut the ribbon and officially opened the Alternative Medicine Project for Veterans in Chicago. The clinic is located at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine at 3646 N. Broadway and will be open every Sunday from 1-4PM. Hours will expand as the clinic sees more veterans. The clinic will be offering free acupuncture, bodywork, and energy work to veterans, their relatives, loved ones, and those who care for them.

Why this clinic?

Many veterans have all kinds of physical and mental health complaints and are interested in trying alternatives to the, often, multiple medications that are often offered by their doctors. Some veterans find that Asian and Native American ideas and methods of healing make sense to them and helpful in their efforts to find relief.

Mary Kay, an acupuncturist and one of the founders of the clinic, relates how it got started. She and a friend went to the screening of *Body of Wa*r a film by Phil Donahue about veteran Tomas Young who was shot in Iraq and paralyzed from the chest down. Throughout the film she and her friend kept on thinking: "We could have been of help to Tomas and people like him." After the screening, Mary Kay went to the IVAW table and asked who she should talk to about providing acupuncture and bodywork to veterans. She was told to go "talk to Hans Buwalda, she takes care of anything we need regarding mental health." Mary Kay contacted Hans the next day and met with her a short time afterwards. A few weeks later, she ran into Ray Parrish, VVAW's veteran counselor, and approached him with the idea of a free veterans clinic. Again, she was immediately asked if she knew Hans Buwalda. Luckily she did. Hans, Ray and Mary Kay then met to discuss the idea of a free veterans clinic in Chicago. In the meantime, Hans had been receiving questions about alternative medicine options from the veterans with whom she was working so Hans, Ray and Mary Kay quickly decided that a project to offer alternative medicine for veterans was a good idea that should be pursued.

All services are free because all providers donate their time and the Pacific College for Oriental Medicine is currently donating the use of the space. The clinic is raising money through donations and fundraising. Veterans and others eligible to utilize the services can also donate if they wish to do so, but they do not have to. People in the Chicago community have been very generous with preliminary donations and the project will be actively seeking larger donations and grants over the next few months.

About 70 percent of the volunteers are veterans themselves. All the volunteers are highly trained in various healing modalities including: both Asian and Western styles of bodywork, Reiki, acupuncture both Nada-style ear-acupuncture and full-body acupuncture. In addition, the clinic offers traditional kinds of spirit healing used extensively by Native Americans and other cultural groups in the world for healing warriors after their return home from battle. The clinic also has volunteers who offer writing groups, art therapy and peer counseling for veterans who would like to explore these avenues for their healing. Referrals to other providers are available.

Since there are a lot of wonderful goodhearted people out there who wish to help veterans but in reality do not know what they are getting into, volunteers for this clinic had to go through a rigorous selection process. They had to attend a full day training on veteran issues and health care, they had to complete an application that included a statement about why they wanted to volunteer at this clinic and what skills they thought they might bring to the work. After all that, they had to go through an interview process with the project founders as well.

In addition, the project has a veteran advisory committee composed completely of veterans. This advisory committee helps outreach and gives input about how to best serve the veterans who come to the clinic. Many veterans and their family members feel stress. Stress is not something that is just in the mind, but it also settles in the body. For example, people who feel stressed may experience headaches or pain in the muscles of their necks and shoulders. In addition many veterans have been injured in a variety of ways during their military service. Both acupuncture and various kinds of bodywork such as massage can be helpful to alleviate stress that settles in the body and address the many physical ailments that veterans and/or their family members experience. Acupuncture has been used for many centuries to address every kind of human ailment and therefore will have many things it can offer to help with the physical and stress related problems faced by veterans and their families. In addition, the clinic will offer ear acupuncture which has shown to be helpful to people struggling with stress, trauma, drug addiction and alcohol abuse.

Reiki, Chinese Qi Gong (both energetic healing touch systems) and meditation can be useful in treating stress-related diseases. Those include most of the diseases that plague our current society, from heart disease and diabetes to fibromyalgia and cancer. Why do all these diseases respond to a reduction of stress? Because the human immune system and all the organs and cells in our body react to stress as an assault that reduces our abilities to process food, to fight against viruses and disease, to sleep and to heal. As the film *Body of War* shows, living with a veteran injured by war can significantly affect the lives of those who live and care for that veteran. However, a veteran doesn't have to be quite as dramatically injured as Tomas Young is for family members lives to be altered by their loved ones experiences in the military. Stress, Depression, PTSD, TBI, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), adjusting back to life as a civilian, being apart for long periods of time, and other problems can also affect family members' lives. In addition, it just makes good sense to take care of those who are taking care of veterans so that everyone can benefit together. Therefore, family members including partners, spouses, children, parents, siblings or others who feel they could benefit from this clinic's services because they have a veteran in their life, are welcome.

Please come and visit!

Want to get treatment, learn more or just come and check things out?

Feel free and visit every Sunday from 1-4PM or call (708) 383-2730 or e-mail the project at ampv.chicago@yahoo.com

continued on next page

VVAW Members Bid Bush & Cheney Good Riddance!

Ward Reilly

George W. Bush started and ended his presidency in the same way... having things thrown at him by citizens, in disgust.

On January 20, 2001, Bush's inauguration limousine was bombarded with rotten eggs and tomatoes, actually stopping the vehicle, and preventing Dubya from walking down Pennsylvania Avenue, a long time tradition for newly (s)elected presidents. An auspicious beginning to what would become his horrid tenure as the Commander In Chief.

His term ended in a similar way, when hundreds of citizens conducted an un-permitted demonstration and march on the White House on January 19, 2009, Bush's last day in office. Scores of shoes and boots were thrown at the front gate of the White House in utter contempt of his pathetic job as CIC. The action was in solidarity with the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, and also with Iraqi journalist Muthathar al Zaidi, who had thrown his shoes at Bush, a month earlier, in Iraq. "This is a goodbye kiss, you dog," Zaidi shouted... and this action on the 19th was our "goodbye kiss" to Bush and Cheney, from the anti-war veterans.

"Shoe Bush," as it was called, was a street action organized by Jamilla El-Shafei, of Boston. Myself, Bill Perry, Mike Hearington, and Bruce Berry of VVAW, joined 500 other activists for this wonderful action on a freezing cold day. We started at Dupont Circle with a rally that included a 15' high blow up doll of Bush wearing his "Mission Accomplished" flight uniform and sporting a very long Pinnochio nose. Hundreds of people that weren't even involved in the protest took the time to stop at the blow-up doll to throw a shoe or boot at the blow up dummy. Members of Iraq Veterans Against the War, Veterans For Peace, Military Families Speak Out, Code Pink, After Downing Street, and several other organizations were represented, and spoke at the rally. Ann Wright, Adam Kokesh, James Circello, Tina Richards, Medea Benjamin, and David Swanson were among the attendees.

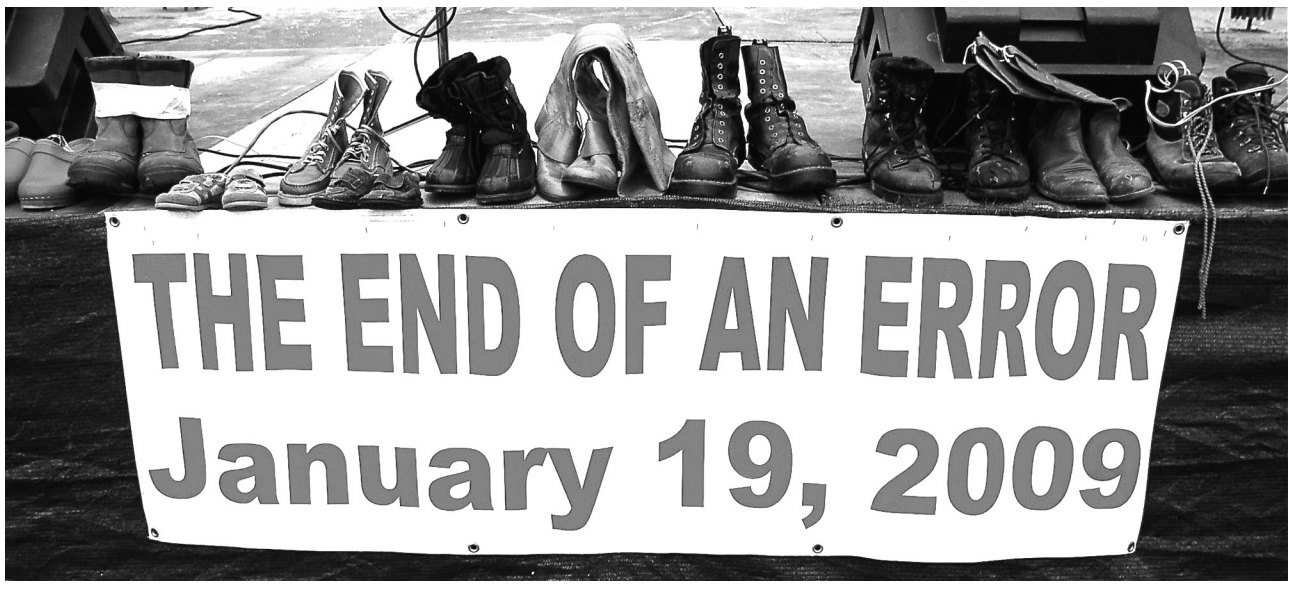
About a dozen people spoke, including Mike Hearington, Ann Wright, Adam Kokesh, and Jamila El-Shafei. A water-boarding demonstration took place, and a 50 foot long copy of the Constitution was added to a petition demanding the arrest of Bush and Cheney for Constitutional crimes.

The action culminated in a march from Dupont Circle to the White House, which was under tight security for Obama's inauguration ceremony set for the following day. We were still able to snake our way through the maze of security tunnels, to the front gate of the White House, and to throw dozens and dozens of shoes and boots at the gate. Amazingly, no one was arrested, even though the shoes came within inches of hitting the Secret Service guards, who didn't really know what to think or do....not even a littering ticket was issued, as the White House undoubtedly didn't want the media attention that this action would focus on Bush on his last day in office.

I had carried a pair of Iraq War combat boots all the way from Baton Rouge to throw, and they were the first footwear launched. I signed them "To Bush From an Infantry Veteran," and "To Cheney From an Infantry Veteran." This action, more than most I have participated in, felt PERSONAL. And I can't think of a better way to bid Bush and Cheney "Good Riddance" than this, even though I would much prefer to see them being escorted to prison after their war crimes trials. We simply can not allow them to walk away into the sunset after what they have done in all of our names.

This was a great action, full of symbolic meaning, and it felt good in spite of the freezing weather in Washington that day.

Ward Reilly is the Southeast national contact for VVAW.



Free Alternative Veterans Health Clinic

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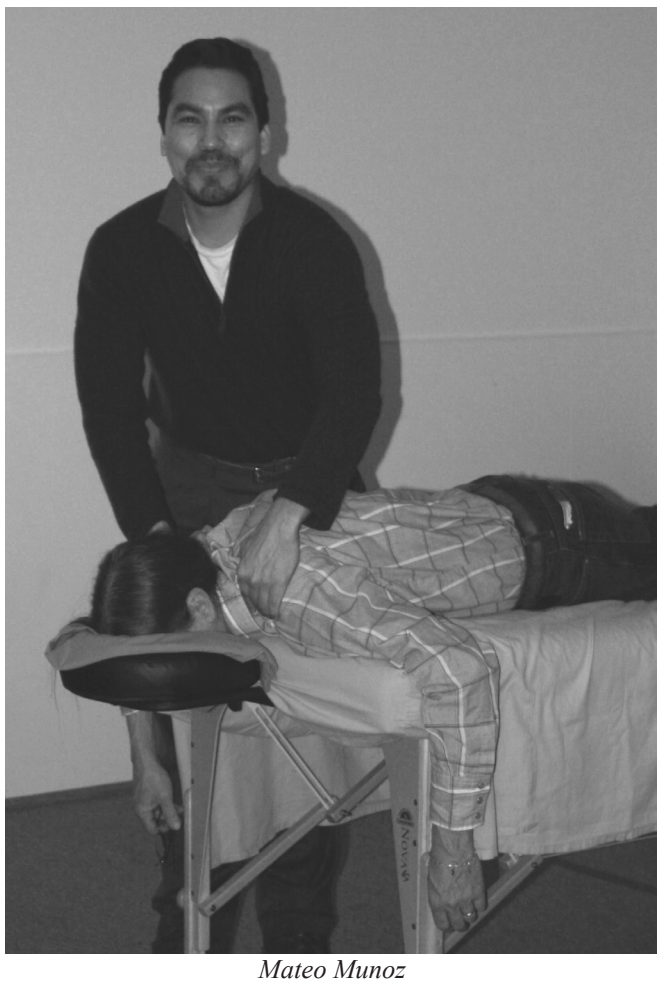
Mary Kay Ryan has practiced Chinese medicine for 27 years and has 20 years experience in creating free public health clinics that offer alternative medicine options. She has written 3 books on Chinese medicine and has taught in Ireland, England and the United States. She has worked with various survivors of severe trauma including AIDS patients, victims of domestic abuse and rape survivors. Barb Schmidt has been practicing Chinese medicine for 9 years in Chicago. She has taught at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine for the past 5 years and has worked in the Chicago area with survivors of torture. She also comes from a military family.

Johanna (Hans) Buwalda is a mental health provider with 20 years experience working with war survivors in the Netherlands, the Philippines and the US and currently has a private practice in Chicago. She volunteers her time with IVAW supporting veterans. She also helps out with medical discharges based on mental health problems, discharge upgrades, AWOL situations, and others. She serves as a consulting provider with the Alternative Medicine Project. If you like to learn more about her and/or if you like to contact her, please visit storiesandart.com.



Mateo Munoz

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
National Contact List

For email addresses, go to our website at www.vvaw.org.
If you need a speaker for an event or class visit or someone to interview, please contact the person nearest you.
If there is nobody in your area, contact the National Office at (773) 276-4189 or email vvaw@vvaw.org.

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SECTION B
The Veteran

Volume 39, Number 1 Spring 2009

IVAW GI Organizing

Aaron Hughes

Thanks to the kind support of VVAW, the GI Organizing Committee of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) was able to hold its first ever active duty training at Coffee Strong just outside the gates of Fort Lewis. We had four simple goals: energize participants, build their confidence, plug them into the GI Organizing network so they know they are "not alone" and share practical organizing skills (grounded in a strategic framework) to bring back to their base.

Despite the fact that four of the active duty members had their leave canceled for reasons such as "it's in your best interests" the training was a success. In a online AAR (after action review) Bobby Grudd noted, "Nice work last weekend everyone! That was effective, positive, creative and productive training. One of my favorite parts of getting involved in this movement has been the friends made and experiences shared with those friends. I think that we all now have the ability to pass on some of the training we received to our members/supporters/allies in our respective area." Ray Curry noted, "Personally, I have gained so much from experiencing each of you and from the collective us. I'd like to thank the newer and more unplugged members for braving the unknowns and risking the journey. Your input contributed directly to the success of this training." Jeff Englehart noted, "it was an awesome weekend. I learned a lot and had fun doing it too." Lily Hughes one of the organizers of the training noted, "I am re-energized and in awe of the number of emerging dynamic leaders in IVAW and the GI movement and I am confident that our work will become increasingly effective."

This was a new model of training for IVAW. Led by members of the GI Organizing Committee Selena Coppa and Seth Manzel, we brought motivated IVAW members from across the country, together with ally organizations such as Courage to Resist, DCOI, IWW and Vietnam Veterans Against the

continued on next page

Winter Soldier Events Continue Regionally and Internationally

Ward Reilly

The importance of military veterans speaking out against any war simply can not be understated. It's critical, because no one else knows more about the truth in war than we do. We in the veterans movement understand this fact, and using that line of reasoning, Iraq Veterans Against the War has continued to show leadership with their Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan...Eyewitness to the Occupations series of speaking events.

Since their original testimonies were made at Silver Spring near DC last year, during the 5th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, IVAW has held regional WSIA hearings throughout the country, so far at UMASS-Amherst, MA, Rochester, NY, Portland, OR, Baltimore, MD, Los Angeles, Gainsville, FL, and Austin, TX. Also, the first international WSIA hearing was held in Freiberg, Germany in March on the 14th.

I attended the hearing in Austin on February 28th, along with VVAW members Bill Homans, aka "Watermelon Slim," and Doug Zachary, of Austin, who helped organize the event. Two panels of 4 spoke in Austin. Following the testimonies, we all marched on city hall in downtown. On Sunday, we all journeyed to Ft. Hood, for the opening of Under The Hood a new GI coffeehouse at Killeen, Texas.

The panels did a fine job, as per the norm of these young anti-warriors, with spirited spoken words, and heart wrenching pain from the truth they spilled out. Hart Viges, Bobby Whittenberg, Marie Combs, Ron Cantu, and Greg Foster of IVAW spoke, among others, as did Gold Star father John Scripsick, who left everyone in the building in tears as he mourned the loss of his son with us. Doug Zachary also spoke in solidarity. Austin can stand tall with the success of their weekend of events and actions!

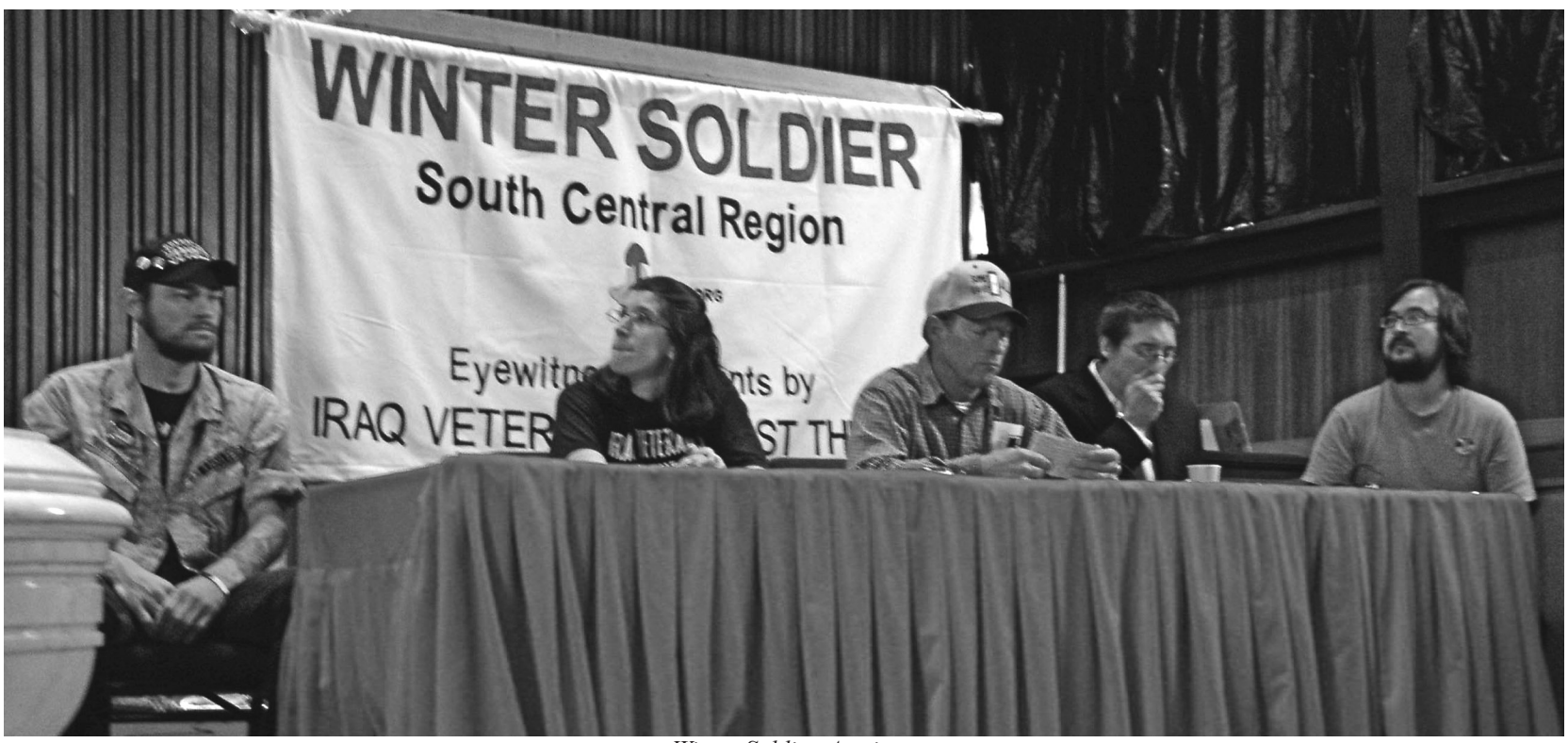
At the post-action party, VVAW's own "Watermelon Slim" put on a great private show, and blew-away the crowd...they had no idea of the greatness that sat down to entertain them, until they heard him play song after song, and tell his stories like no one else can. Hat's off to Slim for stealing the show with LOVE and MUSIC!

In Germany, Chris Capps-Schubert of IVAW-Germany, organized their event in Freiberg, and instantly had the testimonies on Youtube for the world to see. It was a lead-in to the huge demonstration that is to take place in Strasbourg, France on April 4th, when Obama and the rest of the NATO leaders gather to discuss the widening of the occupation of Afghanistan.

There is no better way to educate this nation to the realities of our criminal occupations, than to have the veterans of those occupations speak the truth, and IVAW is doing all they can with this national, and now international, series of Winter Soldier events, with GREAT support from VVAW and VFP.

Hit the streets, y'all, we have a lot of work to do. President Obama will only end the occupations if we ORDER him to do so, by speaking loud and clear in the streets.

Ward Reilly is the Southeast national contact for VVAW.



Winter Soldier, Austin.

Watermelon Slim performing at Under the Hood GI Coffeehouse.

IVAW GI Organizing

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War. Everyone worked to pull together a very successful training in a short amount of time. About fifteen active duty and reserve IVAW members discussed how to strengthen IVAW within the military. One workshop spent time asking the question, how do you talk to fellow active duty soldiers about Iraq Veterans Against the War? Acting through the different approaches used, from sharing common frustrations, to diving right into a question like, "What do you think about that group Iraq Veterans Against the War" built confidence and brought a little comfort to outreach.

A highlight of the training was the presentation by VVAW's Barry Romo about the history of the GI movement. He shared stories about how the GI movement gained ground during the Vietnam War and answered questions about ways we can build an even stronger and better movement.

Special thanks goes to Seth Manzel and Selena Coppa for spearheading the training. Great leaders in IVAW who will help us grow into an extremely powerful organization.

Aaron Hughes is a member of the Chicago chapter of IVAW.

Barry Romo on VVAW West Coast Tour

After the War

Christopher Arendt

The streets are infested with the refuse of the last war. Broken chess pieces from a game that was decidedly one sided scattered like glass across the city maps of our post-industrial masterpiece: our beautiful society. They hold signs that beg for help while they stare into the street where all of the blissfully unsullied capitalists drive beautiful, clean cars. They look into restaurants with tired eyes at meals that cost more than they were paid for a week of awful service to their country, and they are so broken that they are not even angry now. Now I am one of them, I shift along the streets at night with the same hungry obsessions, my hands held out pridelessly in a never ending struggle to find what I need.

Unlike the white bearded old men from the last war, I am something new. I am the advance party for a war that even they do not understand. I am not the first of my kind, but I am one of few. We are sounding the trumpets across the nation that the saints have finally come marching home. The old veterans are like drunken fathers whom I despise. In their faces I see my face and I know that now I too have become an ignorable annoyance to society. I know that we are brothers in being doomed.

I am young and relatively intelligent and I have no major addictions of which to speak or to blame my situation on. My homelessness is one of abhorrence. I am an alien, confused and lonely in a place where I once felt completely at home. But now I have gone to horrible places and I have done horrible things, and now the whole world to me, inside and out, stinks of the memories I have been forced to endure. Money, before a simple side effect of living, now seems a disgusting mental illness that infects the minds of people and makes them let these horrible things that I have done happen. And for this reason I can no longer participate in the financial system. The all encompassing exchange of numbers and the digitalization of self into something not abstract and beautifully complicated, but voiceless and consenting to all of the madness and violence of our fucked up world.

In this way the horror that war showed me was a cure. It has cleared my mind of the fog that allowed me to exchange currency wantonly and without reflection. Now I cannot do that, because I can see the blood dripping off of my bills. And I suppose that I am thankful for this, in a very complicated way. But there is no charm in my life now. The room for that sweet faculty has disappeared into some place inside of my brain that I have not seen since the war began and will likely not see again before I die. I understand that my affliction is more than likely lifelong. There appears to be no hope for those of us who do not have the luxury of forgetting the war.

There is obliteration of all different kinds. One need only go to the liquor store for that. Or report to the state to pick up the mountains of pills that they will give you along with a small share of hush money. There are men selling the cure to post traumatic stress disorder on every corner of every city around the world, but I do not have a disease. In the surreal reality of my experience I have been cleansed of the disease of modern life, and I mourn only for those who still have this illness and refuse to treat it.

Christopher Arendt at Chicago Memorial Day event, 2008.

So now the doped up, fat, stupid Americans are forced to deal with this new breed of trash upon the streets. Young, gaunt, hollow-eyed boys still too proud to ask for money directly are showing up on the streets steadily and I can see them coming. I have made an effort to welcome each newcomer as I see them. Welcome home, brother. We, the bridge burners and the stay up all nighter's are the inheritors of a proud tradition of abject poverty in despair of this nightmare world that we were forced to watch for extended periods of time without comfort or solace. I do not want to know what you did in the war. I do not want to know your job. We are ambiguous now. A homogeneous crowd of malcontents. Your face and your story are now as irrelevant as your needs to the common passer by. As the ghosts of the collective repentance for this war we have a job to haunt the every move of the vapid consumer. We are duty bound to rain on the parades of lovers and successful businessmen who have allowed us to kill and to be killed without regret.

If we fail in our mission then we will have to watch as the streets are again flooded with young, gaunt, hollow-eyed boys coming back from some horrible war that we do not understand, because we are still living in the last one. Drive on.

Christopher Arendt is a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War. He is currently travelling around the world and documenting his experiences as a homeless veteran of the Global War on Terror. He is confused and hungry but free.

Thanks to Kelly Dougherty

VVAW would like to extend a sincere message of thanks and best of luck to Kelly Dougherty, the former Executive Director of IVAW. We are honored to have worked with you over the past several years, especially during Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan. Your work in developing and leading an organization that started with nine members in 2004 and has since expanded to more than 2,000 members today deserves far more commendation than we can offer here. We look forward to continuing the work of fighting for veterans, peace and justice that you contributed to and inspired so many more to take on in the name of justice. Cheers!

—The VVAW National Office

Kelly Dougherty at Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan

Left Behind on the Side of the Road

Duane Linton

The following testimony was delivered at the Champaign-Urbana Winter Soldier organized by the Central Illinois chapter of IVAW in November 2008.

It's 3 AM, and in our humvee, SFC Smith is shouting to the gunner to fire, "Get his ass, gunner! Get his ass!" Hot steel linkages and spent brass cartridges from the belt-fed weapon are cascading down into the truck. Many of them fall on me. For some reason, I find myself oddly preoccupied, in the middle of a firefight, with sweeping them into a neat little pile as angry bullets bounce off the humvee's armor. We've stopped a convoy of pickup trucks, farmers moving their food to market, and they have fired on us because they think we're stealing their food. Naturally, we do what Americans do best – shoot back with superior firepower. The noise is deafening. All four of our humvees are opening fire on the pickup trucks, targeting the tires and engines. SFC Smith is the platoon sergeant, known amongst his men as "Gunny," second-in-charge of this convoy, and when he says to move, there is no question about it. He and I dismount, along with PFC Devon Listerman, and together we creep up on one of the damaged vehicles, under cover of the humvee, and I tell SFC Smith the driver is no longer in the vehicle. There's a strange smell, something sour and metallic that sits on the nose and the tongue. We come around the other side and realize the driver is lying bleeding on the ground. I get SGT Joseph Bautista to cover me, and I head in. I am the only medic within twenty miles. The smell I noticed before is now overpowering, and I realize it's blood. For the rest of my life, I will never forget that smell.

I do a quick visual assessment as I get ready. This man has been hit by three US 7.62mm machine gun rounds, one of which went through his driver-side window, and two of which hit the chassis of the truck and expanded to foot-ball-sized clouds of murderous shrapnel. His right leg is opened up at the femur, and the space between his hip and his knee is just so much hamburger. From the size of the pool of blood he's lying in, he's already well on his way to stage 3 shock. I drop a knee into his high femoral, cutting off blood flow to his leg while I get out my gloves and a tourniquet. The gloves don't work, and after a few moments of struggling, they rip and fall apart. I work on him anyway. I throw a tourniquet on his leg and clamp it down, and then move up to his head. He's talking, a vague guttural utterance of Arabic that I can tell is hard for him. I try to converse with him, asking him where he's from and who he thinks will make the playoffs this year, if for no other reasons than to assess his level of consciousness and to keep my head in the game, but he doesn't understand me at all. All he'll tell me is that he is tired and that he thinks he's dying. I notice he's holding a hand over his chest, which is covered with blood. I try to move it, but he won't let me until I tell him I'm a doctor, having no better word for "medic." Underneath his hand is a fist-sized hole, leaking bright red blood and making a loud gurgling noise. A sucking chest wound. I log roll him and check for an exit wound, but don't find one. I apply pressure with my hand, clean off the surrounding area, and seal the wound. I send SPC Nathan Maston to tell the platoon leader that this patient will die without immediate medical evacuation, and to call for a helicopter and advise me of any further casualties. Word comes back to me that there are two dead and one that ran away wounded. I recheck his pulses, and I don't get a radial one. That means his systolic blood pressure has dropped to a level so low that his body can no longer circulate blood. With SGT Bautista assisting me, I prepare to give him a Hextend IV, which will spike his blood pressure and allow his blood to circulate to his limbs at the risk of blowing any clots that have formed. The Quick Reactionary Force arrives, and with them, another medic from our battalion named Soto. I am elated to see him. As I begin inserting the needle in my patient's arm, I look him over quickly and notice his tourniquet has slipped its cradle – probably still effective but not stable - so I ask Soto to retighten it. He balks, wanting gloves. Listerman pushes past him and tightens it, soaking his eighty-dollar gloves in blood. Once I've got the IV flowing, I direct Soto to dress the leg wounds. In addition to the large wound on the right leg, our patient has a large chunk of flesh missing on his left calf, showing bone, but not life-threatening. I hand Soto Kerlix and Israeli dressings, and together we get the leg wounds taken care of. The IV is finished, so I disconnect the bag and insert a saline lock into the catheter to maintain venous access while I ask about the status on MEDEVAC. I try to talk to the patient again, and he's having difficulty breathing. I check his oxygen saturation and it's at 82 percent. Time for drastic measures. As I prepare to perform a needle decompression, two Apache attack helicopters roar overhead at barely treetop height, raining spent 30mm cannon shells on the pavement all around us.

The Apaches are following a truck that has escaped, and are punishing it with cannon shells and Hellfire missiles. They send a missile through the passenger door, and it explodes inside. They turn their lethal attention to a nearby house. Explosions rock the night as the house caves in. They kill four people in this encounter, and injure another who I will treat later. Meanwhile, 800 meters south, I insert a chest dart into my patient's right lung to perform a needle decompression, withdraw the needle, hear a quick rush of air, and cover the catheter with an Aschermann's. I take Listerman's tape from him and cover the patient's chest in a gigantic mass of tape, just to make sure none of my work comes off. Even still, with all the blood, there's a leak somewhere. I can still hear his chest gurgling. So I apply manual pressure and give the order to bag. Soto assembles the Ambu BVM from my aid bag, and he and Listerman give him forced ventilations while I call off timing and continue to work on the chest wound. The patient doesn't understand that we're trying to breathe for him, and he struggles for air. We don't know the words to explain it to him, so we keep at it, make exaggerated deep breathing gestures, and hope he understands. Eventually he does, and he calms down. Across the patient, the three of us look at each other, and the chatter begins. Soto complains that this guy didn't deserve to get shot. Listerman looks sadly at his eighty-dollar gloves. I realize for the first time that I'm covered in blood. We get the word - MEDEVAC is three minutes out. With that news, we perform final checks and get ready to package him for transport. Listerman's going with the patient to secure him, so I make sure he knows everything we've done so he can brief the flight surgeon. The Apaches sweep by to make sure the landing area is secure, and then the Blackhawk touches down on the northbound lane of Tampa. We're lying on top of our patient, shielding him as best we

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Left Behind on the Side of the Road

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can from the flying dust and sand. As soon as it's on the ground and the rotors stop blasting us, we move in to the helicopter. When it's away, it's painfully quiet. I walk to the humvee, with so little energy left that I'm dragging my aid bag behind me, and I sit inside. I'm more or less in a state of shock after all my adrenaline bled away. Soto notices my odd behavior and chats with me for a few minutes until I am functioning again. I get out, look sadly at the ruins of my aid bag, and try feebly to put it back together. I start to take mental notes on what I'll need to replace, which is a lot. I look around and realize that when our call went out for QRF assistance, ours wasn't the only force that responded. 1/37 Infantry sent a few tanks up to help us, and nothing says, "roadblock" like an Abrams sitting in the middle of the road.

Silence reigns, and we mop up. I walk alone, slowly, around the area where I treated my first patient. His blood is all over the road, a silent testament to something I'm not sure I understand. His truck is still there, and I notice for the first time that it's carrying grapes. Several soldiers are taking handfuls of the grapes and eating them. I am so filled with rage at their disrespect that I want to shoot them. I examine the truck, touching the jagged holes in the metal and staring silently at the bloody handprint on the door frame. I see the splashes of blood on the embroidered throw rug that covers the seat, and imagine how the driver must have felt, suddenly realizing that he's bleeding horribly and he's alone. I envision him, there in the truck, trying desperately to stop the bleeding and having his life flash before his eyes, wondering if he would ever see his family again. I see a large chunk of leg tissue on the passenger side seat and the handkerchief he must have used before he realized he wasn't going to be okay and dragged himself out with every expectation of dying there on the road.

Later that day, Listerman carries word back from the OR that if it hadn't been for me, Aziz would have died. They said he'll make an excellent recovery. They removed a chunk of his lung, and he'll never walk again without assistance. But I saved my first life. And somehow, that doesn't make me feel any better.

In the aftermath, I am roundly criticized by everyone from squad level to the battalion-level echelons of my chain of command because I worked on the casualty without gloves. I defended this action by standing up for the value of my patient's life, but my objections were brushed aside as the life of an Iraqi citizen is openly deemed less important than that of an American soldier. Later, an in-depth investigation reveals that the men we shot were all farmers who thought we were trying to steal the crops they were moving. A misunderstanding. That's all it was. I wonder if that matters to Aziz while he walks around with a cane for the rest of his life.

I struggled for a long time with the implications of what happened that morning. I was haunted by the face of the man I saved, wondering for months if I really did all I could for him. I see the faces of the dead, and for the first week I cannot eat steak or use shaving gel because they smell like blood to me. For almost six months after I knelt in a farmer's blood next to his truck full of grapes, I would fly into a panicked state any time I smelled the scent of grapes nearby. I lost sleep, and felt I was a danger to others. On one occasion, I attempted suicide by chambering a round into my rifle, inserting the barrel into my mouth, and flipping the selector switch to burst. The only reason my squad leader found me in time was that I was contemplating whether the rifle would get off all three rounds before I lost muscular control, whether one round would be enough, and whether I would have time to feel the bullet enter my brain.

None of this meant anything to my chain of command or to military doctors. I saw numerous psychologists and Combat Stress personnel, all of whom accused me of lying to get out of work or to receive sympathy, and ordered me returned to work. I was ridiculed by my peers and my supervisors for being crazy and I was assigned babysitters at all times. I could not go anywhere alone, all the while being hounded by my own humiliation instead of real help. After a while, I realized that the military medical system did not want to help me, and I would never receive any sort of assistance from them. I stopped trying, bottling up my rage, fear, frustration, and psychoses so I could be a face in the crowd. I returned home to find the cork working its way out of the bottle. I had panic attacks, outbreaks of blinding anger, and a battle with alcoholism and addiction to Percocet. I overcame these things through personal struggle. The Army, or any other government agency, never once lifted any finger to try to help me, placing the blame either on me or "post-deployment readjustment." They said it would go away in a few months, and offered me no advice or treatment for the intervening time. They were wrong.

One of our newest soldiers, a headstrong young Texan private named Destor, was operating a 50-caliber machine gun during the firefight, and had the dubious distinction of literally removing an Iraqi's leg from his body from a hundred yards away. At the time, Destor crowed his satisfaction, but several weeks later, during his scheduled R&R leave at home, he refused to return to Iraq. As he was preparing to contact news agencies with his story, we were getting a stern lecture in Iraq condemning Destor's actions, and that if any of us got it into our head to play silly little-boy games like Destor was doing, we would regret it. The explicit statement was made that anyone refusing to return to war, regardless of what he had seen in the course of it, was not a real man. Destor eventually returned, but I could never see again in his eyes the youthful exuberance he had once brought to the unit. There was something missing in him, something he had left behind on the side of the road that day. And I was saddened to see it go.

American Combat Veterans Facing Deportation

Jan A. Ruhman

A scandal of deception and broken promises of citizenship in exchange for military service to past immigrant veterans has been exposed. The DOD targeted 9,000 non-immigrants who have "status" (entered the US on a non-immigrant visa) and who temporarily reside in the US in a "pilot" military recruitment program designed to entice young dreamers, who have extended their visas one or more times, and are more educated than their countrymen without "status" who come seeking farm and day labor jobs and employment in the service sector, with promises of US citizenship for military service.

Not possible, was what came to my mind when I first read the anguished cry for help from the fiancee of just such a veteran in an email forwarded to me by Vetspeak Honcho Willie Hager. He had received it from an active VVAW Member of the San Diego Chapter who obtained it from a local reporter. He asked if I could look into it to determine if it was credible or not before VetSpeak could consider running a story. What I heard from the fiancee of a USMC Gulf War I combat veteran, who was honorably discharged at the end of his first enlistment was, quite simply, unbelievable.

My subsequent research, done in cooperation with a dedicated and knowledgeable Immigration and Criminal Defense Attorney, our face to face interviews with veterans incarcerated in DHS/INS Prisons and on bond, after reviewing the details of the record of their arrest reports, and the transcripts of their court cases during the defining and development stages of this issue proved this one woman and this one case was, in fact, just the tip of the Iceberg of a national scandal of major proportions.

While holding open the front door to non-immigrants with promises of US citizenship in exchange for Military service, American combat veterans and cold war veterans who have served the nation, are being unceremoniously thrown out the back door and denied the US Citizenship that had been promised to them decades earlier. At this very moment, all across America, veterans are being arrested, processed and deported to their country of birth at an ever increasing and alarming rate, often on over blown charges for property and drug offenses.

At this point I think it is important to provide a definition of the word "veteran" and to point out exactly what a veteran is. A veteran is a patriot, the dictionary defines patriot as "devoted love, support and defense of one's country." That is what America's Veterans of all wars do. They take an oath "to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America, the bill of rights, our civil liberties, our freedoms. They go into harms way for us... prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice."

American Military veterans who have served our nation in times of war and peace have "quietly" been deported since 1996 when the Immigration Reform Act (IRA) was passed by the Republican Controlled Congress and "broadly" redefined Aggravated Felony (AG) and took away certain applications for relief. This simple change in the definition of AG in the law has directly affected tens of thousands of veterans who served their nation. Quite simply, they are facing forced deportation or have in fact already been "quietly" and unceremoniously deported over the past 13 years.

A trail of lies has been uncovered at point of recruitment and in boot camps. Statements concerning US Citizenship being "automatic" were related by many veterans we interviewed. Other veterans, who were more educated, knew different and applied while in the military but then deployed to a combat zone and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) didn't have their application follow them. Many, who knew they had to apply, simply found that (as is the case with many veterans upon discharge, especially those suffering from PTSD), navigating the "system" is not psychologically or emotionally possible, for them.

At present, it is estimated that over 3,000 of our fellow veterans are incarcerated and face deportation in Department of Homeland Security/INS Prisons nation wide. They are being processed through court rooms in rented industrial parks that more closely resemble fast food franchises turning out lunch than justice. Many are being held under "mandatory detention" with no option of bail or release while fighting their case. Each month the human misery and degradation suffered by these veterans, their families and loved ones continues to grow.

Many of them are in their mid to late 50's and served during the Vietnam War era. Many more are in their mid to late 30's and are vets who served in Gulf War I. Some served in Kosovo. Left unchecked this horror show of ingratitude and deception will include OEF & OIF Vets.

All of these veterans need your help. They are fighting this battle alone and against the unlimited resources and power of the government's legal system. A system that is processing them for "forced" removal from the country they love and call home. The country they were willing to fight to defend, and possibly die for.

Contact your Congressperson and demand justice for these patriots. Write Letters to the Editor helping to expose this national scandal. Identify DHS/INS Prisons in your area (there are over 300 DHS/INS or "private contractor" Prisons nationally) and help us gather names and other data to support a campaign to demand Congressional Action to put an end to this injustice. Reach out to a veteran's family locally and help publicize the issue. Become involved locally by gathering data in your area, donating to the legal defense fund to help fight the battle in the DHS/INS Courts or in any other way please contact jan.ruhman@vetspeak.org.

Semper Fi.

Jan A. Ruhman is the San Diego contact for VVAW.

Mexico Now At War With Drug Gangs

Slippery Slope Agreement Leads to Veteran's Land Grab

STEVE CRANDALL

120 years ago, on 3 March 1888, a plot of land was irrevocably deeded by John P. Jones and Arcadia de Baker to the United States for the "sole purpose of providing veterans a place to heal from war." That property is now called the "VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System" and is managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In September 2007, the local VA entered into a "Shared Property" agreement with an organized group of Brentwood and Beverly Hills residents calling themselves the "Veterans Park Conservancy" to use 16+ acres of that land, rent-free, as a public park. The agreement runs for 20 years with an option for 10 more. The $6M - $7M worth of improvements are to be paid for through donations collected by the Conservancy. It is clear that this amount of money represents the cost for permanent structures and not just planting trees on the property. Also, prior to entering into the agreement, the VA was pressured into spending $1M+ on a new cast iron fence to remove what the Conservancy termed an eyesore to this wealthy community. To understand how transparent, the Conservancy's motives are, they advertised the proposed park by placing a sign "Beauty, Honor, Country," thus trivializing the US Military Academy's motto "Duty, Honor, Country." Their focus on "Beauty" rather than "Duty" explains their concern clearly. They do not understand the sacrifices veterans and their families have endured to protect our country.

The quest to turn the veteran's land into a public park does not rest solely with the Conservancy group. They are backed by Congresspersons who would rather put this land in the hands of their wealthy constituents than honor the original deed agreement and provide the veterans that fought for this country a protected place to heal from the war. The Conservancy is promoting their project by saying that the land would be used "for the enjoyment and education of the entire community" as if the veterans would share equally in the use of the land. Once this land becomes "public property" the veterans will never see it again because reversing a "public agreement" will be next to impossible.

Veterans groups who have been at odds with each other for over forty years regarding the Vietnam War and more recently over the War in Iraq have joined forces to oppose this give-away. We must all stand together to protect this land on behalf of all veterans and not let this land be stolen.

The "slippery slope" land grab by the Conservancy is not a Democratic or Republican fight. It is also not a local fight here in Los Angeles; this is a national fight for veteran's rights. Public opinion counts the most, so write your Congressmen and Senators to let them know you oppose the VA's actions. Also contact as many people as you can, veterans or not, and ask them to email Veterans United for Truth at vetshome@vuft.org and let them know you also oppose Brentwood's encroachment on this land. Join us and support all veterans!

STEVE CRANDALL IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE CALIFORNIA CENTRAL COAST CHAPTER OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR.

The Elephant

("To see the elephant" is a 19th century American expression, no longer in use. An elephant was the most remarkable thing one could see at a traveling circus, which was itself the most remarkable thing ordinary Americans of that day could experience. The first recorded definition was in 1835: "to see or experience all that one can endure; to see enough; to lose one's innocence." In the American Civil War and after, a related usage was "to see combat and death, especially for the first time.")

We have seen the elephant.
We have gone, and by pure blind luck, returned,
Heroes, larger, no longer the same.
We are back, and we know the elephant.

We came back mad, in shells
Of gray flannel and three or maybe four martinis,
Encrusted with invisible filth that never washed away.
The filth we'd seen, and done, when we saw the elephant.

Some still can not speak of it, the elephant:
Larger than anything. Larger than everything,
Its gray horror reflected, always, in our eyes
And twisted bodies, standing alone at freeway on-ramps.

Some of us identify with it, and woo the elephant, as if
To win its favor, speaking of its glory (and of our part!),
Teaching our children to seek their manhood
In the elephant, as we did. And then we try to sleep.

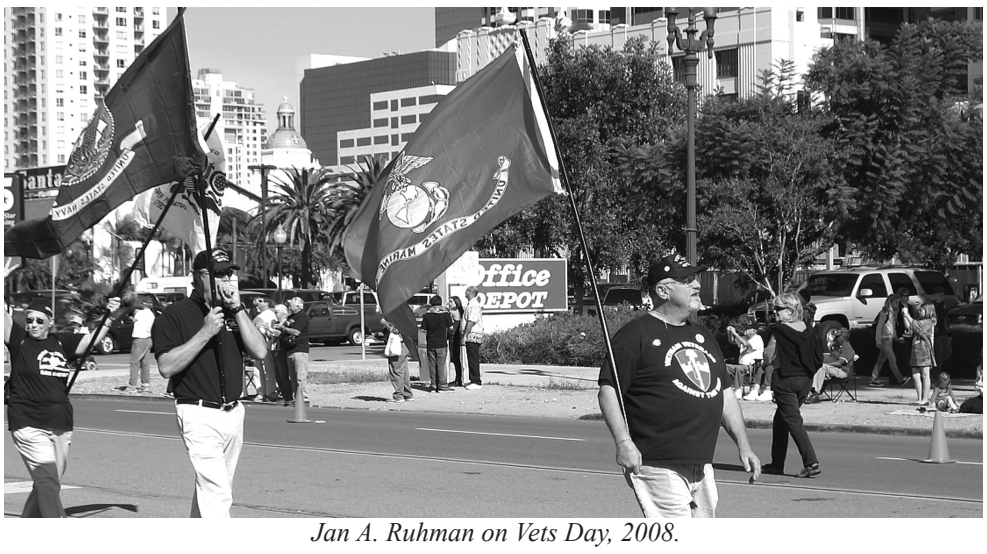
Some of us tell our children there are better ways to die,
And better things to die for. That luck is not grace,
And surviving isn't all that great either, after the elephant.
But children rarely listen. They say:

"Take us! Use us! Make us more than we are!"
Instead it took the ones who had our backs,
It took the ones we would have died for,
And made them dead, and made us veterans.

So, yes. We've seen the elephant.
We've gone, and served, and somehow made it back.
Heroes? No. Just lucky, I guess.
But not the same. We've seen the elephant.

—Eric Bagai

ERIC BAGAI SERVED IN THE USMC FROM 1958 TO 1961 AND HAS BEEN ALMOST CONTINUOUSLY INVOLVED IN ANTI-WAR ACTIVITIES SINCE THEN.



Jan A. Ruhman on Vets Day, 2008.

Coffee Strong: Listening to the GI Voice at Fort Lewis

Zoltan Grossman

The early morning scene could be at any one of the innumerable coffeehouses in the Pacific Northwest. Two baristas serve steaming mugs of espresso, while their co-worker produces graphics on a computer. Another employee plays Rachmaninoff on the piano. Customers are sipping their coffee as they read the morning newspaper.

Yet at second glance, both baristas are Iraq War veterans wearing t-shirts against the war. One served in Iraq as an Army machine gunner, and the other as Marine machine gunner. The guy on the computer was an Army counterintelligence agent in Mosul, and the guy playing the piano was a private first class in the Army National Guard. Most of the customers are wearing khaki fatigues, and reading about their imminent deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan.

This is COFFEE STRONG, a new GI coffeehouse just outside the gates of Fort Lewis, the largest Army base on the West Coast. It is located in Lakewood, Washington, between Olympia and Tacoma. The coffeehouse—whose capitalized name spoofs the recruitment slogan "ARMY STRONG"—was opened on Election Day 2008 by GI Voice, a local veteran-led nonprofit project. It is only the second GI rights coffeehouse to open in the country since the Vietnam War; others have opened in New York, Texas, and Virginia.

COFFEE STRONG is modeled after the GI coffeehouse movement from the 1960s, as described in the book *Soldiers in Revolt*, and the documentary S*ir! No Sir!* But GI Voice is using 21st-century outreach tools to connect with soldiers and their families, such as computers for soldiers to access the Internet without Army interference. The historic project also started a website at www.GIVoice.org, and is planning a radio webstream to connect with military personnel using music and culture.

The goal of the GI coffeehouse is to provide soldiers, their families and recent vets a place away from the base where they can learn about resources available to them, meet with GI rights counselors, and access alternative information. It holds weekly movie nights, and hosts speakers, hiphop, punk and folk concerts, and other events. The response from soldiers visiting the coffeehouse has so far been overwhelmingly positive.

GI Voice is independent of any other organizations or political parties, as an autonomous expression of the community of soldiers, veterans and their families adversely affected by the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Anti-war veterans often feel unrepresented both by mainstream veterans groups that support the wars, and peace groups that do not understand the experiences and grievances of soldiers. Through GI Voice, they are organizing among themselves to speak for themselves, and to provide servicemembers and their families with a place to freely express themselves.

GI Voice addresses issues of concern to soldiers--such as repeated Stop-Loss deployments to war zones, command abuse, repression of constitutional rights, sexual harassment and rape, health and safety conditions, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Yet the purpose of GI Voice is not to reform the military into a more effective fighting machine. Instead, the group maintains that once servicemembers are actively struggling with their command around issues of working conditions, they will start to see the connections between the occupation of other countries and their own oppression in the United States.

GI Voice Director Seth Manzel spent a year deployed in Iraq in 2004, assigned to the 1st Stryker Brigade from Fort Lewis. He wrote in the local newspaper *Works in Progress:* "For soldiers and their families to engage in resistance requires them to stand up for soldiers' rights. The mere act of standing up for one's rights in the Army is enough to slow down a unit's deployment times. The Army could not function if it delivered on all its promises to soldiers and their families. In this way a moderate message, stand up for GI rights, could have a radical effect on the military. We don't need to indoctrinate people in the military. If we inform them of their rights, they will come to anti-war conclusions on their own."

Fort Lewis spokesman Joe Kubistek said the Army is aware of the coffeehouse, but acknowledges that since it is a legal business, the Army will not restrict soldiers from going there. Kubistek added, "We don't have a position on the political views of an outside individual." Manzel jokes that "if they blacklisted us, it would be the best publicity we could get." He asserts that GI Voice does not want to push its political views on customers, saying "We're anti-war, but we're not 'in your face' about it."

Perhaps nowhere else in the country is there such a stark juxtaposition between a large military base community and large progressive anti-war communities, in nearby Olympia and Tacoma. In this area, we see and hear the Iraq and Afghanistan wars almost every day. It is impossible to miss hearing the howitzer fire booming on the Fort Lewis artillery range, seeing the giant C-17 transport planes from Baghdad or Bagram landing at McChord Air Force Base, or overlooking the PTSD exhibited in local car accidents, robberies, bar brawls, domestic abuse, and sexual assaults.

The Iraq War has increased the polarization between the local communities, but also increased opportunities to work together—since both communities actually care that there's a war going on. Pro-war and anti-war demonstrators have clashed on the Interstate-5 overpass at Exit 122, which the Lakewood City Council renamed "Freedom Bridge" to honor the pro-war group's presence. The overpass and the gates of Fort Lewis (and of the Army National Guard's Camp Murray) are only a few hundred yards from the GI coffeehouse, on Union Avenue behind the Subway franchise.

Over the past two years, large direct actions at the Ports of Olympia and Tacoma have protested the movement of Stryker armored vehicles to and from Iraq. Manzel's concern is that

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Commemorating . . . and Looking Forward

Horace Coleman

To commemorate the sixth anniversary of the Iraq war I took part in a mock funeral procession organized by the Orange County (CA) / South Bay (Los Angeles County) chapter of MFSO. Pat Alviso and Jeff Merrick, chapter members and very active organizers, thought of and put together the event.

The funeral procession had two cardboard coffins in it bearing the US and Iraqi flags, an effigy of an amputee troop in desert camis bearing a sign that said "Bring Me Home" and cars with signs saying "End," "The," "War," and "How," "Many," "More?" and listing the current number of KIAs in Iraq and Afghanistan. That day it was 4,258. More than the number of people killed stateside on 9/11.

The procession started in Seal Beach, CA. It passed the Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station, buildings belonging to Boeing (a major employer in the area), a busy intersection in Seal Beach and headed toward adjacent Long Beach, CA. There it passed the VA hospital and traveled to a local cemetery where a short memorial service was held. Speakers made brief remarks and VFP member Keith Gawith and I read poems as a Marine Corps Gulf War vet, a Native American, played his flute.

Cuautlatoatzin's ancestors didn't cross the border; the border crossed them.

The funeral procession ended in Long Beach outside the office of a US Congresswoman. Army Nam vet Ed Garza officiated there. The coffins were unloaded (lilies were later placed on them). A member of the Long Beach Area Peace Network, Karen Quinlan, spoke. So did a minister, Pastor Gary Chomiak. And a mother of a son (Army) scheduled for deployment and another son (Marine) who'd said to her he was "tired of killing women and children." She'd removed the barrel of a shotgun or handgun from his mouth on more than one occasion. A newspaper account quoted her as saying of people deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, "They need to come home now and heal."

In the cemetery Cuautlatoatzin and I had hugged and he said "Now I know how Nam vets felt." Before he spoke in Long Beach, he shared sage with me. The scent had me soaring like the hawk we'd seen before the procession began.

With obvious pain and bitterness he spoke of being told, "Go back to Mexico!" Of being an ignored veteran. With pain he named fallen warriors—and walked away before the trumpeter played Taps.

Some wounds' scars don't show. I hope Cuautlatoatzin soars. This a poem I read at the cemetery and he asked for a copy:

Welcome home!

You've embraced the suck,
now spit out the muck!

When you get thawed don't be awed
by the talkers who aren't walkers.

By those who think nasty and snarky
are the new tough or spilling a latte
while running a red light
is the new rough.

Use and show what you know:
Courage does not mean lack of fear.
Death is always near.
What "I got your back!" really means.
Words without deeds, or
creeds that don't solve real needs,
are trash talk. And, most balk
at difficult or dangerous doings.

Glide as you stride
through this civilian strife.
Let the clueless rave.
You gave.
Let your devils dwindle
and your angels soar.

What it was, was.
What it is, is.
It's not easy but
blend the best and
later for the rest.
Use new weapons
and tactics a new way
in this new day.

Welcome . . . home!

Essayist / poet/ photographer Horace Coleman lives in Long Beach, CA. He is a member of VVAW.

Coffee Strong

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soldiers understand the reasons for these actions, and that anti-war protesters understand that GIs are not their enemy. He says of the new GI coffeehouses, "I think this is going to be a real link between the peace movement and soldiers on the bases that these are outside of." Port protesters have noticed some Stryker soldiers flashing peace signs when their officers are not watching, even if a smaller number of soldiers have instead flashed "half a peace sign."

Fort Lewis has become a national center of GI dissent against the Iraq War, as it was during the Vietnam War. Lieutenant Ehren Watada was tried in February 2007 for being the first commissioned officer to refuse to deploy to Iraq. Peace activists staged a Citizens Hearing Tribunal to present Watada's case that the war is illegal. His court martial ended in a mistrial, and has since won most of his legal case, but the Army has still not allowed him to resign his commission. Other Army refusers, such as Sgt. Kevin Benderman and Spc. Suzanne Swift, have been jailed for a time in the harsh Fort Lewis stockade. GI Voice recently hosted a training of active-duty members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) who are organizing within the armed forces rather than seeking to leave the military.

GI Voice points to a new relationship between the growing GI movement and the larger civilian anti-war movement. Peace groups can support and do outreach to GIs, working with Iraq War veterans who understand best how to communicate with the younger military generation. Peace activists could also educate themselves about issues of concern to soldiers, to open respectful dialogue with GIs and their families, as a step to working together. The GI Rights Hotline (800-394-9544) is a first stop for military personnel and families wanting to explore their options.

Fort Lewis is scheduled to deploy 10,000 more troops later this year, including three Stryker Brigades to Iraq and Afghanistan, making this a critical period for GI organizing in the area. The few other GI coffeehouses in the country have struggled to open their doors or to keep them open. Although COFFEE STRONG has an advantageous location next to the region's busiest fast-food joints, it has competition from the Starbucks on post.

Any kind of support would help the nonprofit GI coffeehouse stay open as a safe space for soldiers and their families. For more information, contact GI Voice, P.O. Box 99404, Lakewood WA 98496, or on-line at www.GIVoice.org or www.CoffeeStrong.com. (Tax-deductible contributions can be made on-line, or with checks made out to "Seattle Draft & Military Counseling Center" or "SDMCC").

As the German poet-playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote:

"General, your tank is a powerful vehicle.
It smashes down forests and crushes men.

But it has one defect:

It needs a driver....

General, man is very useful.

He can fly and he can kill.

But he has one defect:

He can think."

Zoltan Grossman is a member of the faculty in geography at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and a longtime peace and justice organizer. He is a civilian board member of GI Voice (givoice.org), and co-organized the Citizens' Hearing on the Legality of US Actions in Iraq (wartribunal.net). He can be reached at grossmaz@evergreen.edu or on his website at http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz

Farewell to A "Dong Ha Dude"

Henning "Jess" Jesperson, passed away this year. When he died is not really known because when his body was found in his Arizona trailer he had been dead for a few months. He died alone but he is not forgotten.

Hippy, Buzz, Jess, and Poncho were the Dong Ha Dudes. We were all in FLSG-B, 3rd Marine Division, Vietnam 1968-1969. Jess was an engineer, drove heavy equipment, and when he pissed enough people off he was sent to Khe Sanh to dismantle it. He was one of the last people off the base in July 1968.

After Vietnam he returned home to marry. This first marriage produced a lovely daughter, Shayna, and his second marriage a son, Joel.

All the Dong Ha Dudes were in VVAW. Poncho, Bill Hatton, was the regional coordinator for Minnesota during Dewey Canyon III in April 1971 with 15 boys, The Home Front Snipers. Buzz, John T. Noyes, was active in VVAW on many levels for many years – Dewey Canyon III, 1971-74 and beyond. Hippy, John A. Lindquist, is a long term member since Oct. 1970 and a former VVAW National Coordinator. He was even a good cook! Jess Jesperson's first VVAW action was Dec. 1971 in Chicago with Operation Peace on Earth. This was the same action that saw VVAW in Hanoi for the Christmas bombings.

Besides VVAW, Jess did a lot of other veterans work. He worked with homeless veterans, Vietnam Veterans memorials, and represented VVAW on numerous state and county veterans committees. Jess was also quite the stained glass artist. He made service ribbons, night lights, kaleidoscopes, or just about anything. A lot of the income went to help VVAW with it's Agent Orange fundraising. In 1988 he made a stained glass "caltrap" for the Third Marine Division National Reunion in Chicago. A "caltrap" was middle-ages land mine used against cavalry. It was our division's unit patch even though Marines have not been allowed to wear unit patches since 1947. We still know what they are.

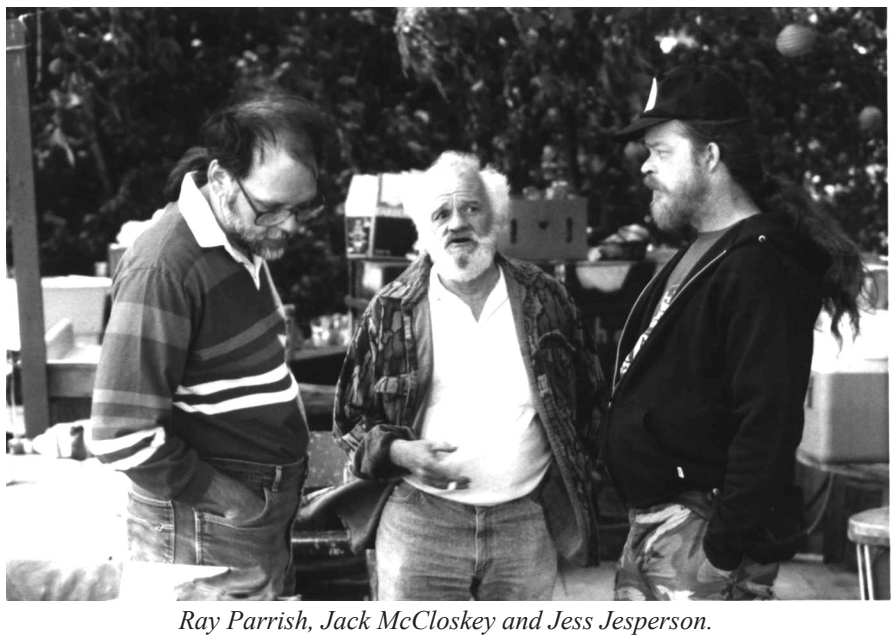
Jess is gone but not forgotten. Once his son gets the body back he will be cremated. Right now tests are being done to determine the cause of death before his remains can be released. At that time some kind of memorial service will be held, probably in Milwaukee or elsewhere in Wisconsin.

Jess, for all of your service to veterans and veterans' causes, I salute you. For all the hell you raised, I salute you. For all the good parties we had, I salute you. Semper Fi Jess.

John A. Lindquist,
Milwaukee VVAW

Jesse Jesperson was a good guy, a loyal friend, and he had one hell of a set of balls on him. He could be abrasive as hell, but beyond that exterior was a fighter for vets rights, unparalleled in his belief in the need for vets to obtain respect. Born in Secaucus, New Jersey, he probably got his grit from being raised there. Jesse was instrumental in my being hired in the school district. Twenty five years later, I'm not sure whether to thank him or curse him out for that. His three favorite expressions were, "Who wants to know?" "What's it to you?" and "What if I did?" Now that's a guy I could admire, and I did. The numerous times I needed him by my side, he was there. The veterans community has lost another friend!!!!

Richie Manson
Milwaukee VVAW



Ray Parrish, Jack McCloskey and Jess Jesperson.

I was very sad to hear from my friend, Richie Manson, that Henning (Jesse) Jesperson, had passed away in Arizona. This brought back memories of the three and a half years that we worked together at Whitefish Bay High School. Jesse was much younger than me and it was my job to teach him about his job as a painter and carpenter. Jesse was very appreciative for all the help and guidance I gave him throughout the years. It did not take me long to realize that Jesse was a proud and loyal co-worker. Jesse also was a very helpful and willing volunteer for our yearly Special Olympics event at the school track. He also volunteered to help his fellow veterans from the Vietnam War and all vets, or anyone in need. Jesse was an altruistic person, a proud father, and was loved by his family. Unfortunately, Jesse was the victim of an industrial accident and was unable to return to work.

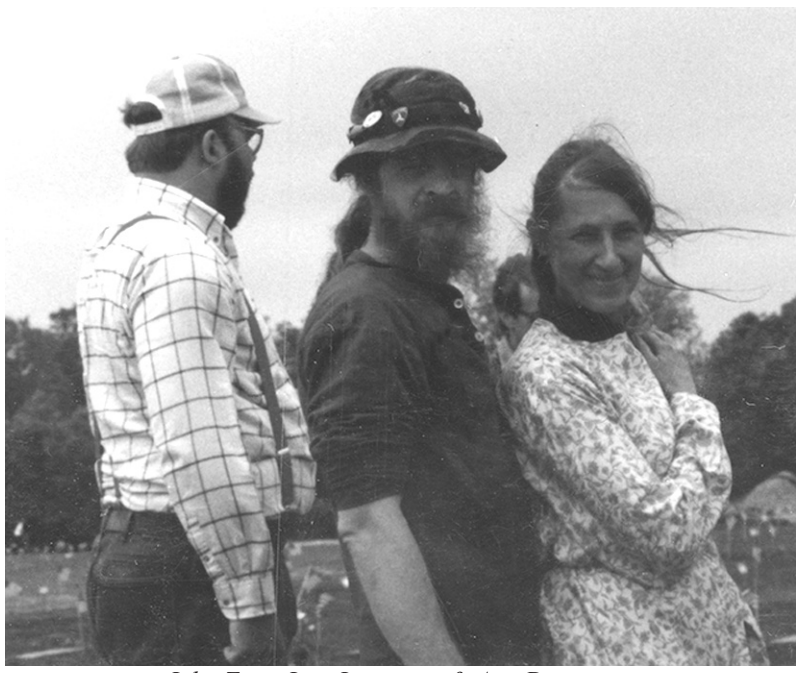
As the years went on, we kept in touch with each other and I was happy to hear that he had gone back to school to learn the trade of making stained glass artwork. When Jesse moved to Arizona we sadly lost track of each other but I will always have fond memories of Jesse. There is no substitute for a good friend! Requiescat in Pace, Jesse.

Pasquale Rea

Jess used to brag that he was the Marine Corps' #1 "shitbird" in Vietnam – meaning he got himself in so much trouble with the lifers that he spent mega time on shit burning detail. That was the way Jess was, he liked to stir things up. He was one tough s.o.b. that never backed down from anything. In the 1990's, as VVAW's Midwest Regional Coordinator, he somehow got himself included on just about every veterans affairs committee in Wisconsin, despite the fact that most of the other mainstream vets organizations shunned VVAW because of it's political positions. He was able to bridge that gap because of his relentless dedication to fighting for veterans' rights. I believe that this quality was apparent to these other groups also. His main focus was always on vets helping vets and not political rhetoric.

I became a national coordinator about the same time Jess became a regional coordinator so he would call me at least once a week to fill me in on what he was doing. If my wife answered the phone and it was Jess, she would hand me the receiver and say, "see you in the morning." He could go on for hours. Sometimes it got to be a bit much but what I wouldn't give for one of those calls right now. Rest in peace brother.

Dave Kettenhofen
Milwaukee VVAW
National Coordinator

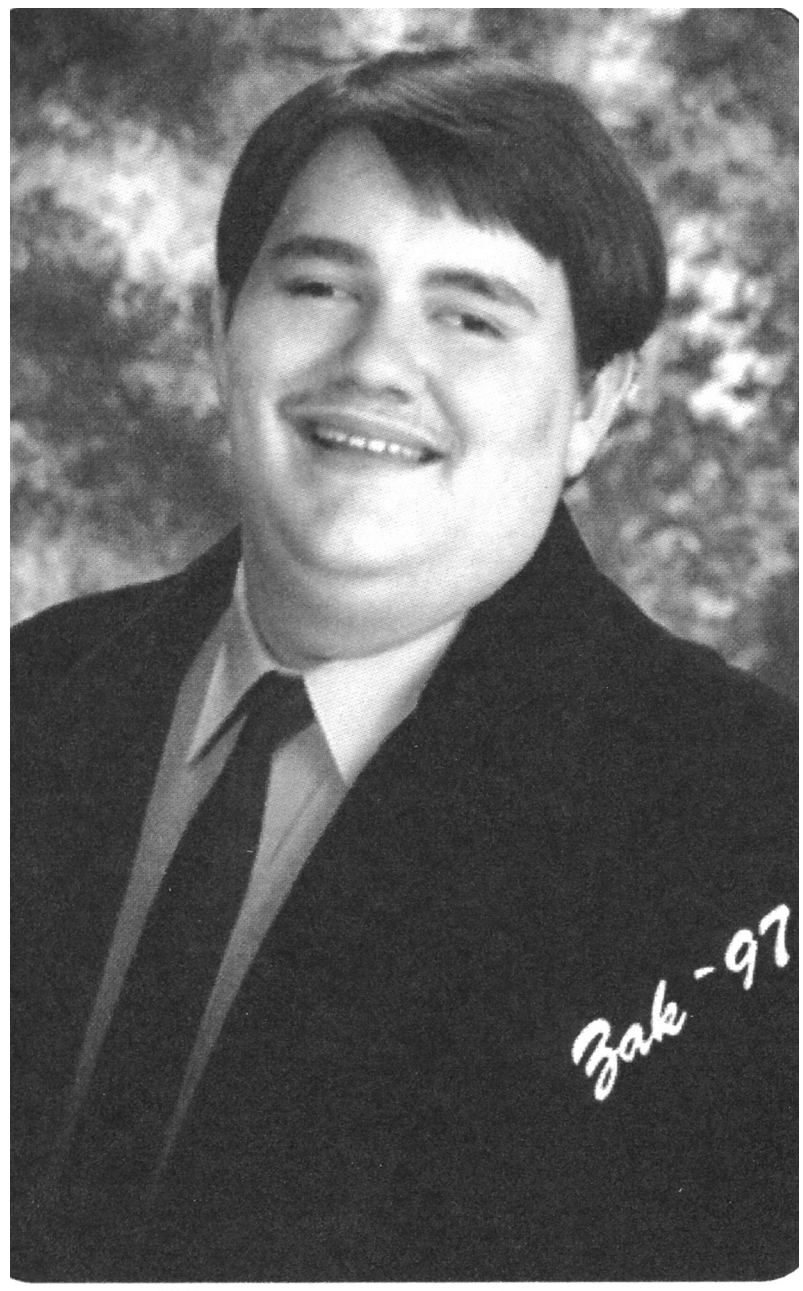


John Zutz, Jess Jesperson & Ann Demerest.

Obituary for Zak Wachtendonk

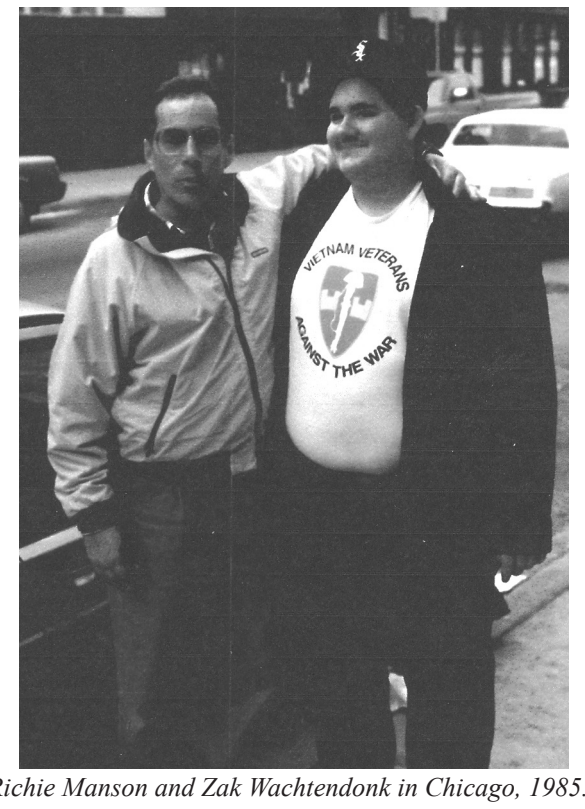
Richard Stacewicz

Zak Wachtendonk died on March 18, 2009. He was born to Jim and Sukie on February 8, 1979. Like thousands of children of Vietnam Veterans who had been exposed to Agent Orange, Zak was born with chromosomal damage that severely impacted his ability to live a normal life. He suffered seizures when exposed to airborne chemicals and dealt with a myriad other physical problems. Despite all of the obstacles he faced, Zak was an incredible human being who touched the lives of everyone who knew him. He was known as a gentle and deeply caring young man who overcame many of his physical problems with sheer will and determination. He took part in family activities and was a fixture at VVAW campouts in Wisconsin. The numerous testimonials of those who knew him well are best reflected in the words of Dave Kettenhofen who wrote that he will never forget "his upbeat attitude and the permanent smile on his face." Over time, Zak developed a deep and ongoing interest in computers. He managed to channel his energies into various activities and interests while at the same time having to confront his ongoing physical challenges. His life is to be celebrated for the joy he brought to others and the great strength he exhibited. That he, and countless others like him, have had to endure the tragic consequences of a war that preceded their time on this planet serves as a reminder that the effects of any war are generational and enduring. This is a lesson that should never be forgotten and his life has been a reminder of that legacy. Zak's love of life and his indomitable spirit will also live on in the hearts and minds of all who have known him. He will also continue to help others due to his desire to be an organ donor. As Sukie, Zak's mother wrote, "His eyes will help others see with wisdom. His bones and muscles will allow another human being to walk tall and straight. His arteries and veins will perhaps help another crusty old vet have a couple more years under his belt. His skin will be grafted onto burn victims in hospitals all over the country." Live on Zak!

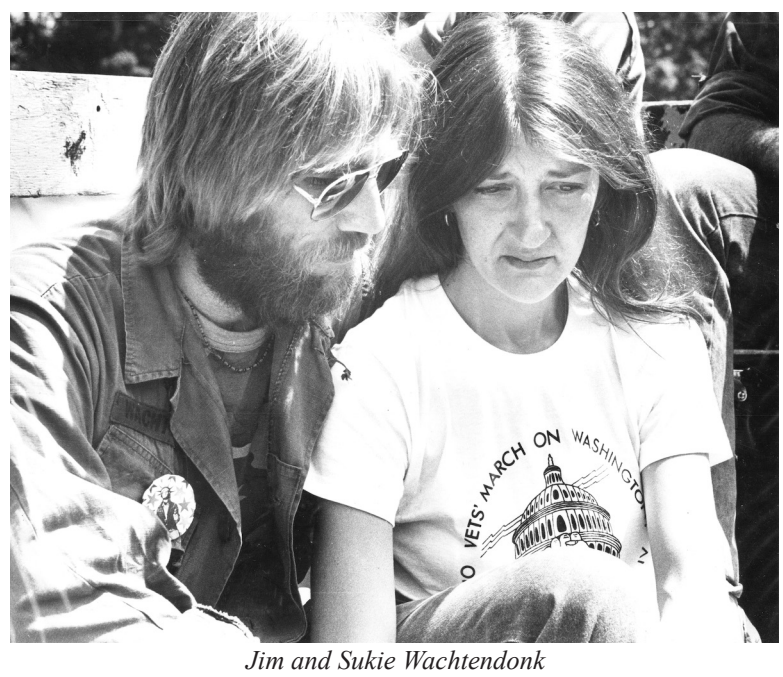


February 8, 1979
to
March 18, 2009

Richard Stacewicz is a Ph.D. in history, author of Winter Soldiers, and Professor of History and Social Science at Oakton Community College in Illinois.



Richie Manson and Zak Wachtendonk in Chicago, 1985.



Jim and Sukie Wachtendonk

The Contract

Robin Long

In 2004, when military resister Jeremy Hinzman applied for refugee status in Canada, the Conservative government interfered at his hearing challenging evidence disputing the legality of the War in Iraq. The UN Handbook for Refugee's and the Nuremberg Principles state: a soldier of an Army that is involved in an illegal war of aggression has a higher international duty to refuse service and the right to seek refugee protection in member countries. This sets a precedent which could close the door on that legal avenue for refugee protection.

The US invasion of Iraq was clearly an illegal war of aggression. The US was not under attack, or the eminent threat of attack from the nation of Iraq, nor was the war approved by the UN Security Council. By taking this stance, the Canadian Government implicitly condones the invasion and continuing occupation of Iraq. Is that what Canadians want? A majority of Americans want it to end and have come to realize it is a mistake, at best. Canadians have long known it to be wrong. Why is the minority Conservative government still holding on to the idea and still deporting war resisters? Why are they separating families and aiding in the imprisonment of morally strong men and women?

In June 2007, Canada's Parliament voted on a non- binding resolution to allow war resisters and their families permanent resident status. That vote passed, and in agreement with that vote, a poll of Canadian opinion showed overwhelming support for the resolution. In defiance of parliaments intent and the will of the people, the Conservative minority government, led by Prime Minister Steven Harper and Immigration Minister Diane Finley ignored the bill. The Government stated: All refugee claimants are given a fair chance to plead their case before the Refugee Board, and special treatment to these Iraq resisters were unfair to other claimants. Further, they stated that we are not legitimate claimants because we are from the US, and that the US has a fair and transparent justice system, and that we wouldn't be singled out for being political.

On July 14th, 2008, in my final attempt to stay in Canada, where my son and community is, Federal Judge Ann Mactavish stated that I didn't prove I would be treated harshly by the US military for being a politically outspoken opponent to the War in Iraq and Bush Administration policy. She predicted my punishment would be a minimal 30 days in the brig and cleared the way for my deportation/extradition. Only 10% of these cases go to Court Martial. A month later, I was tried in a Court Martial presided over by a judge, a Colonel in the US Army, who has President Bush in her chain-of-command. She was later appointed by Bush to oversee trials at Guantanamo Bay, no doubt because of her political credentials.

The only aggravating evidence the Prosecution presented was a 6 minute video of me stating, among other things, that I believed my President lied to me. A political statement. The fact that this was found admissible in court for the charge of Desertion is beyond me. No character witnesses were brought against me. The only factors the Prosecution wanted shown in determining my sentence was the fact I was political and exercising my freedom of speech in criticizing my Commander-in-Chief.

It is a conflict of interest to have a judge determine my fate who must ultimately answer to the President, while I was claiming that same President was a domestic enemy, who used any reason, and manufactured reasons, to invade and wreak havoc in Iraq. The judge gave me 30 months, 2 1/2 years, for not showing up for work I believed to be morally objectionable and criminal. By far the harshest sentence given to a resister/deserter of the Iraq War.

I plea bargained to 15 months. I still get a Dishonorable Discharge (DD). A DD will keep me from many fields of employment, from any Government position in the civilian world. It will make getting home loans all the harder. This is a FELONY CONVICTION- which will make it very hard, perhaps impossible to return to Canada to be with my young family. It is the worst grade of discharge there is.

People that committed far worse crimes have gotten lighter sentences than me. 1st Infantry Division soldier Spec. Belmor Ramos convicted of conspiracy to commit murder of 4 Iraqi men received only 7 months. I refused to participate in killings; he stood guard while others executed four unidentified Iraqi men then dumped their bodies in a Baghdad canal. During his court martial Ramos admitted his guilt, stating: "I wanted them dead. I had no legal justification to do this."

This is justice? The system is neither fair nor impartial. Can it really be transparent when you don't know who in the chain of command is influencing the judge? Do you see how the military justice system works? – Condone killings with light sentences, but God forbid someone should call President Bush a liar and a warmonger. A persons words and political opinion must be far more damaging to the good order of the military if they are anti-war and critical of the President, than soldiers criminal actions in an occupied foreign nation.

People have argued that I signed a contract. I'd like to quote from a letter one of the Founders of our United States wrote to General Washington concerning his thoughts on contracts in April, 1793: "When performance, for instance, becomes impossible, non performance is not immoral. So if performance becomes destructive to the Party, the law of self-preservation overrules the laws of obligations to others. For the reality of these principals I appeal to the true fountains of evidence: the head and heart of every rational honest man." - Thomas Jefferson.

For me to continue in my military contract would have been destructive to me as a person with my views, morals and ideals. Let alone the Iraqi's, who have died in the hundreds of thousands. The unit I was serving with was NOT called up. When I enlisted, I expressed moral concerns about the invasion of Iraq. I was given orders to a non-deployable TRADOC post. There, I learned a lot about the atrocities that are going on in Iraq from soldiers filtering in from Germany, Fort Carson, Fort Hood, etc. I talked about how wrong this invasion was with my brothers in arms and was met with mixed responses. In April of 2005, I was given high priority/ short term notice to support occupational requirements of the 2-2ID in Iraq. I alone in my unit got these orders. I was to catch up with a unit already in the thick of the occupation, fighting. This AFTER failing to get CO status. Coincidence? I think not.

The contract I signed was to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, from all enemies, foreign and domestic, and to obey the LAWFUL orders of the President and those officers over me. I did not sign on to be a strong arm for corporate interests or oil. The so called Liberation of Iraq has turned into nothing more than a constant and protracted struggle by the people of Iraq, against forces, seen and unseen, that are trying to impose their will on them in a public war for private power and profit. True freedom is the ultimate expression and condition of a people to control their own destiny, not the manufactured variety being offered here. True democracy is not found at the point of a gun. It rises up from within the mass of the people.

It wasn't about WMD's, or we would have found some. It wasn't about "regime change" or we would have been in Darfur, Indonesia or a dozen other countries. It wasn't about 9/11 because they were from Saudi Arabia. It doesn't say anywhere in my contract that I would be going to foreign soil, half way around the world, to invade a country that was of no threat to the United States. To risk my life, not in defending the people or Constitution of the United States but creating more enemies for them by being in an occupying force. Iraq, however unhappy under our former ally/ client Hussein, was never a real threat. The destabilized nation of Iraq has become a breeding ground and awesome recruiting tool for Al Qaeda. It has cost the American people an enormous price. I'm not talking just the trillion dollar financial burden, but the human cost of the war. The deaths of so many of our brave youth, the missing limbs, the PTSD and the suicides. The invasion has made far more enemies for the United States and made the world a far more dangerous place.

The order to go to Iraq was not a lawful one. It violates our Constitution. Article IV states that ANY treaty the US is signatory to shall be the supreme law of the land. Last time I checked, the US is signatory to the Geneva Conventions. There are certain

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"Just Crazed" War Vets?

The Vietnam War is over for most
Strange homecoming without a toast
"Just crazed" vets back on the block to endure
Looks, questions, and talk from the unsure

You're not one of those "just crazed" vets are you?
Please don't take it personal in this job interview
I'm not hiring anyone with combat flashbacks

Have you been engaged in any militant acts?
Did you kill anyone while you were there?
Your eyes look so distant with that stare
How did you feel about killing innocent babies?
"Just crazed" war vets like mad dogs with rabies

Images of the dying held in your arms with grace
Blood, sweat, and tears running down your face
Who killed whom and how does anyone really feel?
Ask a "just crazed" war vet about war and "real"

Time is of the essence but not really a cure
Flashbacks of horrific images always to endure
Hospitals, meds, homelessness are the placed bets
Peace of mind never comes to "just crazed" war vets?

—Paul Cameron

Paul Cameron is a Vietnam War veteran, married with two children and three grandchildren. He lives in Sainte Genevieve, Missouri and work part-time in Illinois as high school counselor.

Purple Heart Iraq veteran and IVAW member Bobby Whittenberg, speaking at Winter Soldier Austin.

Vets Day Parade in Manhattan, November 11, 2008.

The Contract

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laws in that treaty for declaring war, last time I checked, "regime change" wasn't one of them. A country must be under attack or imminent threat of attack. Neither was true in the case of Iraq. President Bush had no right to interpret the Constitution as he saw fit, on the grounds it was a new world after 9/11, and the 107th Congress had no right to pass HJ Res. 114, which "allowed" the President to invade Iraq. The Constitution was being ignored by the whole lot of them and they were derelict in their duty to uphold it.

The position that the Conservative government of Canada has taken has separated a family, an act totally un-Canadian. I have a young son, a Canadian citizen, and a Canadian partner with MS, left to raise our son while I'm locked in a brig for refusing to participate in a war Canada, in 2003, under a different Government, wouldn't send troops to. They saw the holes in Bush's "intelligence." By deporting me, and not giving me a chance to leave willingly, I have been barred from entering Canada for at least 10 years. My flesh and blood is there!

The Conservatives are destroying Canada's tradition of being a refuge from militarism and an asylum from injustice that goes back to the times of slavery. Are they truly representing the people? Who are they working for, really?

Bush is gone. Obama's administration has a different view and a different policy. Its time for Mr. Harper to change his view. He should listen to Parliament and the solid majority of his citizens! Let me return to Canada to be with my partner and son. I want only to live in peace and be in his life.

Please support the movement to allow War Resisters to stay in Canada and pardon the ones in the US.

STOP THE WAR. Peace, love, light.

Robin Long,
Prisoner L4830R35
PO BOX 452136
San Diego, CA, 92145

Washington's Battle Against America's Veterans

Luis Carlos Montalván (reviewer)

The War Comes Home: Washington's Battle Against America's Veterans
By Aaron Glantz
(UC Press)

In January 2009 alone, 24 active-duty veterans of our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan committed suicide. The following month, the Army announced that there were 128 documented suicides in 2008, the highest active-duty number since it began keeping records in 1980.

When the subject of veterans' care is raised in most circles, people tend to think of the scandal at Walter Reed Hospital or of Soldiers and Marines returning home without limbs and/or with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Rarely, do they grasp the deeper problems facing veterans.

This ignorance, which is encouraged by Government agencies, explains why *The War Comes Home: Washington's Battle Against America's Veterans*, will enflame readers' passions while enlightening their minds.

What makes this book about war different?

From the time of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs and the scrolls of Homer and Herodotus, literature's most memorable dramatis personæ have been warriors. Indeed, humanity seems continually captivated by the paradox captured by Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Tolstoy further reminded us, "In all history there is no war which was not hatched by the governments, the governments alone, independent of the interests of the people, to whom war is always pernicious even when successful."

The author of *The War Comes Home*, Aaron Glantz, who spent parts of three years covering the war in Iraq, does what no professional journalist has done heretofore - he chronicles combat from the bloody Middle Eastern battlefields to both the hospital beds where broken body parts lie and the living rooms where relationships are torn asunder as a hidden but real collateral damage of these wars.

The effects on America's sons and daughters, their families and our society at large are meticulously detailed through Glantz's powerfully compelling yet simply rendered factual accounting. He explains how the government and its systems have created the neglect behind the Walter Reed scandal as well as the outrage that is the Veterans Administration so-called health care system. In so doing, he appeals to our collective conscience.

One result amounts to an impassioned plea to the US government to wake up and undo the bureaucratic logjam that prevents wounded heroes from recovering. Glantz makes clear that the struggle begins the moment a service member returns home from the war zone. Veterans' readjustment to family, friends and society is often complicated or even sabotaged by the symptoms of PTSD.

Glantz discusses Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), the signature wound of Mr. Bush's wars that ravages the once able-minded. Citing mind-boggling RAND Corporation data, he reminds us that more than 320,000 veterans have experienced TBI while deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.

And he reminds us that only when a returning soldier or Marine utters a cry for help does the fight really begin - against the unsympathetic and inhumane juggernauts of the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans' Affairs.

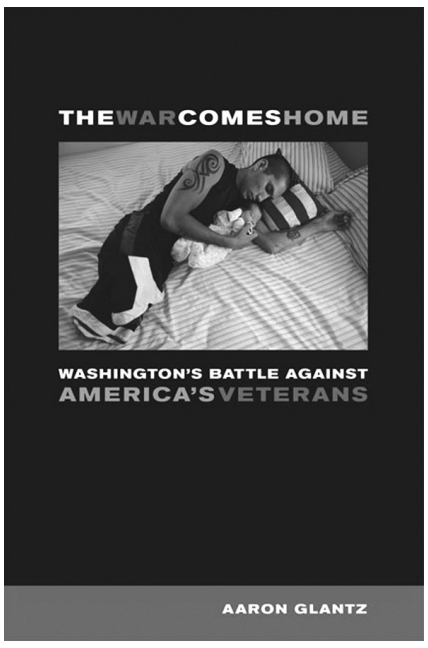
One of many personal stories woven into the narrative is that of Army Specialist Eric Edmondson. On October 2, 2005, while supporting a Marine Corps offensive near the Syrian border, his Stryker vehicle was struck by a terrorist-detonated Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Edmonson lost his right leg and his spleen to shrapnel. Eric's family had to put their own lives on hold in the effort to support their son by, as they put it, "trying to battle our way through the labyrinth of bureaucracy called government."

One of several trenchantly named chapters is *Homeless on the Streets of America*, so called because, according to records compiled by the VA and the National Council on Homeless Veterans, on any given night, nearly 200,000 veterans "sleep in a doorway, alley or box." Sad to say, most of these veterans served in Vietnam, but those of today's wars are steadily swelling the ranks of the homeless.

Full light is thrown on the growing backlog of veterans' disability claims. Since the start of the Iraq War, such claims "have grown from 325,000 to more than 600,000," Glantz writes. To the everlasting shame of the previous administration and others inside the beltway, neither the VA nor the DOD has done anything to anticipate the future increase of veterans. Six years into Iraq and Afghanistan, the VA still fails to care adequately and appropriately for these men and women.

Glantz's monograph raises the quintessential question that has been repeated throughout history, "Why is it that, generation after generation, Americans who've risked their lives for their country return to do battle with their own government?"

The answer is elusive. But Glantz believes that when the media raise a veterans' issue, politicians are only temporarily stirred. Even then, it usually serves



only to deprecate the mistreatment of those who have sacrificed for their country. Shortly after, both press and politicians tend to revert to idle talk that leaves veterans to suffer anguish and frustration in silent anonymity.

Simply put, *The War Comes Home* is transfixing. Like Rodin's famous sculpture, The Thinker, perched atop the Gates of Hell, what lies between the book's lines expresses simultaneous rage and sadness. For veterans who read the book, traumatic memories of fellow soldiers loved and lost may exacerbate physical and psychological wounds. So, be prepared to scream aloud, reach for the pills, or both.

Mr. Glantz concludes by asking what he calls "the billion-dollar question": Will the former administration's loathsome legacy mistreating millions of veterans continue, or will a new President's vision and promise bring forth the fulfillment of Abraham Lincoln's famous call, "...to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan"?

Only time and veterans will tell.

Former Army Capt. Luis Carlos Montalván served two tours in Iraq leading cavalry elements and advisory teams.

More Than a Memory

Michael Burke (reviewer)

More Than a Memory: Reflections of Viet Nam, Victor R. Volkman, editor
(Modern History Press, 2009)

More Than A Memory: Reflections of Viet Nam, tells the stories of more than a dozen Vietnam veterans, in poetry and verse, deploying us back in-country quicker than a rifle shot. These are frontline stories with plenty of GI savvy and insight, not some Hollywood hacks cracking copy out for a movie or series, its the real thing. And if this one doesn't take you back in-country, chances are you were never there.

Edited by Victor R. Volkman, this book's 217-pages come alive with the memories many of us thought had long ago been erased from the blackboards of our minds. We become recipients of this outstanding selection of riveting tales and fascinating stories such as *Kangaroo Court Martial* by Shirley Jolls and Walter Aponte and such powerful poetry as *Pop Smoke*, by Dayl Wise.

This is one book of truth we can wrap around ourselves, the same fabric of another war that should have never been. Borrowing a few lines from the back cover--"In poems, stories, essays, and photos, fifteen veterans remember. Traumatic memories are never in the past: they live on and sear the mind every minute of every day."

Michael Burke is the VVAW Atlanta Contact.

More Than a Memory

Horace Coleman (reviewer)

More Than a Memory: Reflections of Viet Nam, Victor R. Volkman, editor
(Modern History Press, 2009)

Some people say "There's only two kinds of music: Country & Western!" Duke Ellington said "There are only two kinds of music, good and bad." Both broad statements exclude much that's worthy.

More Than a Memory: Reflections of Viet Nam is a collection of poetry and prose. In one of the essays in the collection called, "Nothing So Bad It's Not Poetry," Alan Farrell talks about what he calls "Vietvet or Namvet poetry."

He writes "As I look back at my favorite war poems, poems I've learned in school, I find that—to the extent that they meant any thing to me—they do so for reasons mostly of form, of structure, of rhyme, of rhythm, of image . . . of craft in short."

What it really comes down to is something that gets your attention about something the writer makes you care about as he pleases you. Something worth saying said well. Craft is how well you use the tools picked to get the job done. The worth of the job is how well it does what it's supposed to do.

Farrell reincarnates and updates Rudyard Kipling's Tommy Atkins in Nam in his poem *The Man Who Outlived His Lieutenant*. Its refrain goes:

That's a combat man 'ere talkin', sir
Seen the bear an' smelt 'is fur
Shots in anger, CIB
Get in a fight, jus' do like me

Before the review copy arrived, I was rereading *Obscenities* by Michael Casey (published in 1972) and enjoying, once again, the poem "A Bummer," which ends:

If you have a farm in Vietnam
And a house in hell
Sell the farm
And go home

Did you hear someone way back there, way back in the day say ". . . Sell the farm and keep the house!?" It don't mean nothing if you didn't hear some variation; you know the feeling. The combination of content, remembrance and comment do the job. However, often the more you have to bring to the work to "get it" well the less work the writer has done well.

Casey made the mold—or caught the spirit—of much of the early published poetry of Nam vets: Flat in tone, matter of fact, direct and conversational, stripped of rhyme and meter; short on imagery.

For a long time vets who'd been there and lived that found it hard to publish in mainstream outlets—no matter the quality of their work. The academic and "professional" poets held the high ground—they deserved it (supposedly) because of their reputations and for bravely "speaking out." Who were those people who thought their experience equaled others "proven talent" and "experienced eloquence?"

Every thing vets wrote was just the same old story, a fight for survival—not glory—comic grossness, callous humor. Although *More Than A Memory* is uneven in quality, it has high points.

Marc Levy uses the Casey approach well in his poem *Peace Time*. It lists the names soldiers had for combat and describes what happened in spare and matter of fact language like Jack Webb's policeman Sgt. Friday or cowboy John Wayne or Clint Eastwood might (with effective repetition). One verse goes:

They walked into our patrol
Or we walked into theirs
Or we ambushed them
Or they'd ambushed us
Or we walked into each other
Or they hit us with mortars
Or overran us with sappers
Or booby-trapped our automatics
Or we called in Arty

Repetition with variation of the same ol' deadly same ol' recreated with words describing the ways death and numbness came.

Levy's short prose piece *Whatever You Did in War Will Always Be with You* gives the lowdown on the lingering regret too many still have, says what PTSD is and briefly describes some treatments for it.

Levy's prose pieces *Torque in Ankor Wat* and *Off the Road* are gritty travelogues of his odysseys in Cambodia and Vietnam respectively. Preston Hood, the writer with the most publishing credits in the contributors' notes, paints an image of *Boats Near Hue, Vietnam, 1997* with lines like "The sea: white beach in formless prayer" and "Dark clouds shoulder into a gathering storm." In the last verse of *Pop Smoke*, Dayle Wise brushes aside the macho shield of invulnerability warriors carry:

We're tired and want to go home.
Mother take us back.
Let us suckle in your arms.
We've been very bad.

There's a thing called Cowboy Poetry. It has its own form, style, subject matter, situations, types of people and behaviors, locale and target audience. It's of the people, populist and not academic or traditional—except in its own tradition. Vietvet / Namvet poetry same same. You pay your money, spend your time and some of it satisfies. Which implies the obvious and opposite.

Horace Coleman was an Air Force air traffic controller / intercept director in Vietnam (1967-68). He also served in Tactical Air Command, Pacific Air Command and North American Air Defense. He speaks at grade schools, high schools and churches and lives in Long Beach, CA.

Shared Sacrifice

Aaron Davis (reviewer)

Shared Sacrifice: Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the Global War on Terror
By Gary Barkley
(Iuniverse, 2008)

I highly recommend IVAW member Gary Barkley's brand new release, Shared Sacrifice; *Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the Global War on Terror* . Activated from the IRR, Gary served a one year tour of duty in Iraq as a US Army Civil Affairs/Operations Officer for the Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mosul. The book intersperses his staying in old WW II barracks at Ft Bragg, with being the Lt. no one knew or wanted. With his amusingly sarcastic humor, he even refers to himself as "lefttenant." "You can't make this shit up," he quips finishing most of his funny experiences. He questions the war. He intelligently shakes up the brass. He gives us a profound look into fraud, waste and abuse by civilian contractors, and the opulence of the Green Zone. As a gay man in a combat zone dealing daily with DADT, he again challenges the status quo thinking and policy. The most important part of Gary's book is where he challenges us as activists to engage in dialogue and take back the country. He says what's on his mind, and he asks former SecDef Donald Rumsfeld why his adminstration did not given weapons inspectors "more patience." He was against the war from the beginning. Now he writes, speaks and marches against it and is helping to form a new Iraq Veterans Against the War Chapter in Utah. He holds degrees in Accounting and Economics from Utah State and currently lives in Salt Lake City Utah. He can be reached at gsbarkley@gmail.com.

Aaron Davis is a veteran activist, outreach counselor and coordinator of the G.I. Rights Hotline in Salt Lake City, Utah. He is the Utah Regional contact for VVAW. He served as a Marine Sergeant and Army Officer.

Operation Dewey Canyon III

Rick Thorngate

I returned home from Vietnam in December of 1969 as a decorated First Lieutenant from the 101st Airborne Division. I had turned 23 years old at the battle of Hamburger Hill earlier that year, where I saw us give that piece of land back to the NVA for free after we had taken it at a dreadful price. As a student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, I began to involve myself with the anti-war movement, giving speeches and writing articles against our involvement over there. When I heard about the upcoming Winter Soldier Investigation to be held in Detroit in January of 1971, I hitched my way there to give my testimony. While in Detroit, I met Tim Butz, an Air Force vet who was active in VVAW, who told me about the proposed demonstration being planned for that spring in Washington, DC. Desiring to do something on the national level, I left my home in California and moved to DC where I joined up with Tim and settled into being the DC Coordinator for Operation Dewey Canyon III.

We had very little funding and virtually no budget, but the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) gave us some office space. We had a desk and a phone. Not much, materially, but we had a mission, and that was enough to get us going. As time went on we developed lists of people who were planning to join us from other states and began to do street work in DC, visiting bars at night. Being white and going into black bars could have been a problem, but, wearing my jungle shirt with the Screaming Eagle on both shoulders, I was welcomed home by many a soul brother vet. Informing them of the upcoming events, I did not need to remind them of the large percentage of black vets who were also grunts like myself, even though I had been an officer. I felt that it was critical to have real representation when we hit the streets.

Tim and I went to several meetings with the DC police and the National Parks police to attempt to coordinate our plan. Needless to say, they were not the most helpful, but we informed them of our plans and managed to get a few permits.

About a week before the start of the week of protest, I wrote a leaflet entitled, "An Open Letter to Our Brothers in Blue." Essentially, it stated that a couple of thousand of us were coming to town to protest the war. It emphasized that we were combat vets who understood what it was like to wear a uniform and obey orders just like they (the police) did. We also understood that many of them were also vets and might agree with us that the conduct of the war was not honorable and that the conflict must end, and that they might be on our side. We said that we would welcome a contingent of "Police for Peace," but that we also understood that they might place their jobs in jeopardy if they did so, and we did not want that. We emphasized that our quarrel was not with them, but with government policy, and offered our hands in comradeship, stating that we would not disobey them and force them to arrest us, and would understand any subtle support that they could give.

Printed on pale blue paper, the leaflets were distributed to the various precincts at shift changes with smiles and handshakes. The flyers were accepted with friendly suspicion.

In the week proceeding the actions, vets and media began to fill the office. At first, Tim and I acted as spokesmen for the group, but after a while, we told the reporters to talk to "that guy over there." When asked who "that guy" was, we replied that we didn't know, but that he was a vet and had his own story to tell, and that that was the reason that we were here. Not as elitist, dogmatic radicals, but as salt of the earth, normal guys who had experienced things that needed to be heard. That led to many reporters beginning to understand what we were really all about.

After we had done the flyer to the police, we had collected some spare change and had brought some cold beers up to our eighth floor office and were sitting on the floor chatting away when a tall, thin dude in a suit walked through the door. We offered him a beer, but he demanded that we stand. He announced himself as the National Coordinator of VVAW, said his name was John Kerry, and that we should show him some respect as he was a former Naval Lieutenant. As a former officer, myself, I told him that if that was his attitude, he should return to the Navy and leave us alone, that every vet was equal once we were again civilians. He was not amused. Little did we know that he would eventually be a US Senator. But, I guess that arrogant attitude goes with the territory.

When the day finally arrived for the start of DCIII, as it had become known, I joined the California delegation and Tim joined the vets from his home state of Ohio. The encampment kind of automatically arranged itself into state delegations, like the national political conventions. The national leadership wanted us as soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen, but we didn't have it that way. Looking around, there was one thing that was wrong. We were almost all white. But, after the first day's actions and all the TV coverage, that changed. Our visits to the streets and bars of DC had paid off, and the black veterans began to show up with their uniforms and medals, and they joined in fully. Now, it looked right. Now, the brothers were with us. Now, it was real.

One of the vets from out west, a Native American, had brought a sacred tom-tom and had begun to drum the heart-beat of our encampment. Soon he was joined by other vets with djambes and congas and a drum session began that went for 24 hours a day until the end of the event. Just as the sounds of generators and artillery and small arms fire had filled the air on the firebases of Vietnam, so, too, did the staccato and thumping of many drums fill the air of Dewey Canyon III. It felt good. It was good to hear, and it was cathartic to do.

One of the main actions during DCIII was constant street theater. Across the country, anti-war vets groups had joined with feminists in a strong union. They were protesting sexism, and we, as male veterans, understood that we had suffered because our gender had placed us in combat. And, so there were many female supporters. They dressed like Vietnamese women, with black pajamas and conical hats and went and sat at street intersections all over Washington, blocking traffic and stopping business as usual. We, dressed in our jungle shirts and carried toy M-16s, then marched down the sidewalks to the intersections and did a little search and destroy mission on them. This was guerrilla theater that mimicked the guerrilla war that we had fought in the villages and hamlets overseas.

Almost immediately, police officers were on the scene and would order the disruption to move on and to clear the intersection. At this point, the women would leap to their feet and rundown to the next intersection to once again sit down and block traffic. We would form up once more and march in formation ... hup, two, three, four, hup, hup, two, three, four... to once again do our thing. The police would then saunter, slowly behind us, giving us time to act out our theater and keep the traffic snarled. Our little blue leaflet had had it's effect. The police were on our side, and as long as we did not disobey their commands to move on, they did not arrest anyone at all. This was a lesson that the later civilian student radicals never learned. The police were not our enemy. They just had a job to do, and, by not confronting them with "no," they could do their job over and over and over again.

One of the great things about Operation Dewey Canyon III was the mass support we received from the people of DC, Maryland and Virginia. There was a long, long line of civilians bringing food to the camp. Fresh baked hams, yams, pies and cakes. Soups and salads of all kinds. It was a massive feed of home cookin'. Many of them were government employees doing their part to passively support our efforts. Each morning three pretty young secretaries from the FBI, who were Californians, brought the California delegation coffee and donuts, crossing the lines of police that had surrounded the encampment. It was very heartwarming as well as belly warming when the rains began.

Long about the third day or so, a slight drizzle had begun to fall. But, we were not to be deterred from our mission. Even when John Kerry, the National Coordinator, ordered us to break camp and move to another location that he had negotiated in his suit and tie with the congressional folks. The Supreme Court of the United States had ordered us to vacate the Mall. Many of us were aware of the Bonus March

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Viet Nam and Families at War

Bobby Hanafin (reviewer)

Home Front: Viet Nam and Families at War
By Willard D. Gray
(Airleaf Publishing, 2006)

A Must Read for ANY Military Family that QUESTIONS:

When will the war finally come to an end?

No, we are not talking about Iraq, Afghanistan, or even the War on Terror. We are talking about Vietnam. As a Veteran of both Vietnam and Gulf War One, a Retired Military Officer, and the father of a Soldier who served in Iraq, I passionately recommend this insightful book to ANY military family who QUESTIONS, let alone opposes, the Global War on Terror. In fact, I recommend it to anyone who questions what our government has committed our nation to without the full consent of the American people, and without unequivocal National commitment and sacrifice.

Home Front: Viet Nam and Families at War is a primer for what Military Families who question, not oppose, but only question the War on Terror can expect from their community if they had done the same sort of questioning during Vietnam. This is a must read if you are a member of Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) or can relate to our concerns.

After reading *Home Front...*, and now having something to compare it to (the home front during Vietnam and Iraq), the experiences of military families who questioned (but few opposed) the Vietnam War receive far worse reception and treatment than anything today's military families who question receive.

I believe what accounts for this is the overwhelming number of American citizens who have been willing and able to question the motives and declarations of our government. More people today know for a fact that our government leaders habitually lie to the American people. During Vietnam, especially the first half of the war, at least until 1968, the vast majority of the nation, including troops serving in Vietnam found it impossible to believe our government would lie to us.

Home Front: Viet Nam and Families at War teaches and informs those of us who can relate, and the public in general, of the private and public humiliation, personal family ordeals, and shattered families that a questionable and controversial war had brought to any military family that questioned the Vietnam War.

Despite what critics have said to dissuade Gray from writing the book and others from reading it, not one veteran, including Gray, not one family written about in this book was part of the established anti-war movement back in the day. Their only socio-political crime was having the patriotic gall to question the war and course set for the nation by decision makers who, like today, cannot relate to those who carry the burdens of war. The basic difference between Vietnam and Iraq is that during Vietnam there was the facade of national commitment via the draft, but for Iraq precious few have been asked to or expected to sacrifice for the rest of us.

Their experiences, an ongoing tragedy since the last US Soldier left Vietnamese soil, reveal the physical and psychological wounds of war. Veterans suffered from PTSD, when it was unheard of and its existence challenged. There were a proliferation of bad conduct, personality disorder, or failure to adjust to military service discharges that were less than Honorable, even if the Veteran had served multiple combat tours in Vietnam.

The lesson we as military families can take from reading this book is that as Gray said these are, "wounds that don't discriminate between soldiers and their families regardless if they are pro or anti-war."

From the backwoods of Maine to the rugged wide open spaces of Montana, Gray has collected testimony from at least a dozen soldiers and their extended families. On hindsight this is testimony that should have been given at the first Winter Soldier Investigation, but that one, I believe, did not have a panel for Military Families shattered by the war. Most families back in the day would most likely not have attended anyway, because it was the war they questioned, but did not oppose. Most families only sought, like the Tillman's today, answers from their government and military as to why.

Gray's book breaks the myth spread by the pro-war movement that it was liberals and the liberal media that lost the Vietnam War as it would be the shameful elements that would lose the Global War on Terror. The centers of the anti-war movement back in the day were urban areas and college campuses, not rural America by a long shot. Frankly, the center of the anti-war movement today pretty much remains the urban scene; there is realistically no anti-war resistance on college campuses, because we have no draft. If a family resides in rural America, that is where most volunteers for Iraq and Afghanistan come from - YOU BETTER NOT QUESTION LET ALONE OPPOSE THEIR WAR! However, the price you pay comes nowhere near what these families endured during Vietnam.

The parallels between how military families were ostracized during Vietnam and Iraq are frightening. These families were literally terrorized by fellow Americans. Though not as bad, such harassment continues today and will continue as long as there remain questions.

Bobby Hanafin is on the Editorial Board of Our Troops News Ladder, a Member of VVA, DAV, and VVAW. He spent near 30 years serving the nation in and out of uniform as enlisted and NCO in the Army went to college on the Vietnam Era GI Bill, got his commission in the Air Force retiring in 1994.

Operation Dewey Canyon III

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after WWI where federal troops under the command of Douglas MacArthur and his aide Dwight Eisenhower had opened fire on their encampment killing and wounding vets just like us. But, like our grandfathers had done, we were not going anywhere.

After a quick meeting with my fellow California vets, I took to the stage, following our illustrious leader, and stated that we had not come three thousand miles to be moved about like cattle. We were proud veterans and American Citizens and had every right to be where we were, and if turning and running was what VVAW was all about, we were not having it. So, I told the dripping wet crowd, we had voted ourselves out of existence and if anyone passed where the California delegation was and noticed people there, we were now independent veterans doing our own thing. Very California.

Almost before I finished speaking, a Gold Star Mother from Michigan, bearing the flag Uncle Sam had given her in memory of her son's sacrifice, eloquently stated that her son had died bravely and that she would not let that bravery die with him, and that the Michigan delegation, "in solidarity with our brothers from California" had also voted itself out of existence. Next came a rep from "the Great Volunteer State of Tennessee" who voiced their union with us. Before long the entire encampment had bolted and refused to obey John Kerry's order. Nobody moved camp.

The next day the *Washington Post* headline read "VETS OVERRULE SUPREME COURT."

About 90 vets then went and did a sit-in protest on the Supreme Court steps. This time they did not move either, and they were all arrested peacefully. And, amazingly, each one of them was bailed out, on the spot, by the arresting officers. Truly, they were also on our side, once more.

Operation Dewey Canyon III was the pivotal demonstration of the Vietnam War. Many analysts concluded that it was the straw that broke the camel's back as far as public opinion went. The sight of us returning our medals in body bags, of us marching in the streets, proud and honorable was too much to bear. No one could argue that we did not have the right to speak our truth. We had paid in blood, sweat and tears in ways that will never die.

Statue of Liberty Xmas 1971

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Brothers Home" leaflet was given to him but he left pretty quickly. Then we barred the doors and put up a minimal barricade with the bar metal that was available from construction of the "New Immigrants" display.

The Director of the National Park Service (NPS) was hunting in Alaska and out of contact. He and the NPS Police had jurisdiction, not the NY or NJ police, although they were said to have wanted to help. Our legal advisor, Peter Weissman (?) tied up law enforcement reaction for nearly two days letting our message play on an international stage for all three days. Ray and Bob had all international and US media outlets notified the moment we took over. The media kept the police at bay and, as we all know, we were entitled to make our continuous anti-war statements. We had to vote on taking an order of contempt... it was 8 to leave and 6 to go to jail. I wanted to go back to the campfires in Valley Forge.

Rod Kane (DC Coordinator VVAW/DCVC) mentioned in his book *Veterans Day*, "neither the government nor the 15 of us realized that the doors opened outward. Our saving grace (in my opinion) was the hordes of press that were present (thanks again, Ray G.) made it impossible for a heavy-handed response."

Years later I met Sherman Adams who was the corresponding new face token for *NBC* (Jerry Rivers aka Geraldo Rivera was the other). He was in the desk at

NBC and took a call from the White House demanding that the story not play in the evening news... some things never change.

We have lost Mike Parker... we should find a way to reconnect. I know that this event, this crazy moment of trying to end the war and bring our brothers home, is something that we all carry with us... a fine moment in our lives.

In Peace, Jim Murphy

Jim Murphy is a long-time member of VVAW from New York.

Fairness and Accuracy in Middle East Reporting

Fred Samia

"Truth is the first casualty of war."

My initiation, more than thirty-five years ago, into what Aeschylus' dictum meant in reality was striking. In 1973, just a few years after fighting as a Marine in the DMZ in Vietnam, I was again in the middle of unimaginable destruction and suffering, this time as a free-lance photojournalist documenting the bombing of civilian Palestinian refugee camps in southern Lebanon for UNRWA (United Nations Relief Works Agency for Refugees). The cinder block and tin roof huts still smoldered as I photographed people tearing at the remains trying to reach loved ones trapped in the rubble. When returning Phantom jets roared overhead I jumped into a bomb crater large enough to accommodate a good-sized house. UNRWA, who administered these camps, sent the photographs I took to the wire news services, but their captions failed to mention Israel or the Israeli Air Force, the deliverer of the deadly cargo. When I asked the editor, a well-meaning and principled British woman about the omission, she indicated it was in UNWRA's best interest not to name them.

And in 2000 I would again hear and read the twisted logic of Israeli "self-defense," as I followed the swath of devastation cut by the invading Israeli military through Lebanese cities, towns and villages before it was forced out by Hezbollah fighters, who were not Iranian, but poor Lebanese Shiite patriots.

Once again we are being asked, this time by Messrs Halevi and Oren, (*Los Angeles Times* Op-Ed, January 4, 2009) to disbelieve what we see with our own eyes, perhaps know in our own hearts, and instead accept an "expert" version of historical and current events. US made and US taxpayer-gifted Israeli F-16 jets are bombing the most densely populated area in the world: 1.5 million Palestinians, the vast majority civilians with a median age of 14, living in an area only slightly more than double the size of Washington, DC. Israeli tank shells are killing innocent victims—not supporters of an Iranian fifth column bent on the destruction of the State of Israel.

Once more the sad coda of lies is repeated that Israel takes extraordinary care not to harm civilians while heartless Hamas (and any Palestinian faction resisting armed occupation) uses its own citizens as human shields. The song stops just short of reiterating the "they-don't-have-the-same-respect-for-life-that-we-do" refrain. Israel, like other occupying powers, knows that the base of any resistance movement is the people and to destroy that base means to attack the people. And if they can't all be killed then instill in them as much suffering and fear as possible. This is the reality of the "spirit...of one of the most impressive airstrikes since the 1967 Six-Day War."

If Israel has to kill thousands more Palestinians, Lebanese and any others they deem necessary, it is now to be justified as part of its battle against the great Satan Iran. Once again, forty-plus years of illegal occupation, oppression, national homelessness and misery are conveniently forgotten and all ills rested upon the shoulders of Hamas and the Palestinian people. Halevi and Oren, like other servants of the Israeli state, exaggerate Iran's power and influence, using them as a mask to hide Israel's own expansionist policies. The Israeli military juggernaut will have little trouble with those few thousand lightly armed fighters opposing their invasion, but the "problem" of Gaza and the Palestinians in general will not dissipate with the cordite smoke.

Facts once more are reinterpreted so that democratically elected Hamas becomes "a terrorist regime that seized power" and broke a truce that Israel had never really honored, while others, like the US- Israeli blockade and sanctions—violations of international law—that so increased the hardship and desperation for Gazans are ignored. Also conveniently ignored is the fact that Hamas was cynically created by Israel as a counter force to Arafat's Fatah, and that Sharon's refusal to negotiate in good faith with moderate Abbas contributed to Hamas' electoral victory.

What is the reality of those restrictions and sanctions? The American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) in March of 2008 reported, among others, the following statistics:

- 80% of families in Gaza on food aid—approximately 1.1 million people.
- 70% of households in Gaza earned less than $1.20 per person per day.
- 18.5% of patients seeking emergency treatment in hospitals outside refused permits to leave.
- 40-50 million liters of raw sewage discharged into the sea daily for lack of fuel to run treatment plants.
- Hospitals and other public utilities experience power cuts lasting 8-12 hours a day.

Now that Israel has launched a full-scale military invasion—not an "incursion," the situation is that much more desperate and harrowing. There are reports of overwhelmed and under-supplied Palestinian doctors performing surgery without anesthesia in hospital corridors.

For there to be a future for Israel-Palestine there must be fair, accurate and unbiased reporting of the facts. And for there to be genuine peace between Palestinians and Israelis, basic civil and human rights, including independence and statehood, must be guaranteed for all.

Fred Samia is a free-lance journalist who has lived in and reported on the Middle East and Europe.

Where We Came from,Who We Are,Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is more than 30 years old. It belongs to VVAW, and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without permission.

Beware of VVAW AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW! DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership

P.O. Box 2065, Station A
Champaign, IL 61825-2065

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email address _____
Branch _____
Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
Unit _____
Military Occupation _____
Rank _____
Overseas Duty _____
Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

VVAW is a democratic organization. Chapters decide on local programs and projects under the general guidelines of the national program. Chapters elect local leadership and representatives to annual national meetings where major organizational decisions are made and national coordinators elected. These coordinators are responsible for the day-to-day organizational leadership of VVAW and issuing national publications.

Signature _____

Date _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.

RECOLLECTIONS

Statue of Liberty Xmas 1971

Jim Murphy

Motivated by hearing about the loss of Mike Parker who was one of the four Maryland VVAW members in the Christmas 1971 takeover of the Statue of Liberty, I thought I would share my recollections of the event.

To Michele Osborne... I knew your Uncle Mike... Mike was the most clean-cut VVAW member I ever saw. He was sincere, insightful and helped with our precision. My memory of our conversations includes his reminiscing, while we were in control of the statue, about his having done duty at Governor's Island USCG and falling asleep at night waiting for the Lady's arm to fall off.

I am sad to hear that Mike has passed... he was a really fine brother... In Peace, Jim

I was coordinator for the Maryland VVAW during the period that "Operation Peace On Earth" occurred. We hammered out the week of demonstrations at Len Sproehnle's apartment in Philly. The main ideas for the Statue demo were conceived by Ray Grodecki and Bob Clarke, PA VVAW.

We camped out at Valley Forge beginning Dec. 24rd 1971 (we were big on symbolism... still are). After a great campfire and 'do you remember Boone's Farm etc', fourteen of us left for NYC on Xmas Day, staged at Ray Halperin's (?) in NJ and took off for NYC and the Statue early on Dec. 26th.

There were 4 of us from Maryland, 4 from PA. and the rest from MA and NY. The other brother from Baltimore was Bob Barracca... another incredible brother, Steve Juli, was the 4th member.

"Vietnam Veterans take the Statue of Liberty, December 26th 1971." Fourteen members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War "liberated" the Statue of Liberty with a sit-in to protest resumed US aerial bombings in Vietnam. They flew an inverted US flag from the crown as a signal of distress." There was one extra member, an unheard from member of P*acifica News Service*.

It went like clockwork. Steve Juli and I were the first two to get on the Island along with Ray Grodecki and Bob Clarke, the gatekeepers, letting us up through the locked gate into the arm of the statue. There were two locks on the gate to the arm, one high and one low. Ray and Bob cut the lower lock and we were the last ones up the stairway which was sealed and circular, no one could see them bend back the wire mesh gate and let us squeeze in. I was first so I got to watch lower Manhattan all day til 5PM, sitting

next to the lights at the top of the torch as VVAW brothers two by two came up into the arm.

By the last boat of the day, there were 14 vets and one young reporter from *Pacifica* standing on the ladder going up the arm. When the lights came on, it was time to move. There was an old nightwatchman on the first level. We told him we had peaceful intentions and that he could join us if he wished - "Bring Our

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In Iraq